

BEYOND NASTY WOMEN & DEPLORABLES:  
BRIDGING POLITICAL DIVIDES BY FOCUSING ON SHARED MORAL VALUES

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## **ABSTRACT**

Chelsea Schein Beyond Nasty Women & Deplorables:  
Bridging Political Divides by Focusing on Shared Moral Values  
(Under the direction of Kurt Gray)

Liberals and conservatives are becoming increasingly divided. While liberals and conservatives hold opposing moral views, a new theory of moral psychology, the Theory of Dyadic Morality, suggests that these views are unified by a common denominator of harm. Inspired by this theoretical perspective, I examine whether appeals to overlapping moral values, such as harm, can reduce the dehumanization of political opponents and increase people's willingness to engage in bipartisan conversation. In Studies 1-3, I test whether perceptions of moral dissimilarity predict negative attitudes toward political opponents and disinterest in engaging with others. In Study 4, I examine whether there is an asymmetry in how we ascribe reasons, including harm-based moral reasons, to agreeing and opposing political beliefs, and whether this perception of moral dissimilarity corresponds with political animosity. Finally, in Studies 5-8, I test whether manipulating perceived moral similarity decreases dehumanization and increases engagement relative to a control condition and other types of similarity. Across these studies, I find that perceptions of moral dissimilarity correspond with a greater disinterest in engaging in dialogue. Any type of similarity decreases dehumanization, and in turn increases willingness to engage, but moral similarity has a stronger effect than other types of trivial (food taste), and more profound (personality) types of similarity.

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## CHAPTER 1: INRODUCTION

Fill-in the blanks:

*Widespread gun ownership in the United States is a \_\_\_\_\_ (moral right/national epidemic). If \_\_\_\_\_ (more/fewer) people owned guns, thousands of innocent lives could be saved. The devastating shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School and similar tragedies would not have occurred if guns were \_\_\_\_\_ (allowed/prohibited) in schools.*

If you were a card carrying member of the National Rifle Association (NRA), you would undoubtedly circle the first set of answers. Owning a gun is a moral right, if not a patriotic duty and bleeding-heart liberals are morally weak, and pathetic for failing to protect their families. In contrast, members of Mothers Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, a nationwide organization founded in the wake of the Sandy Hook shooting, would immediately circle the latter choices. Widespread gun ownership is a moral failure of the United States. If conservative NRA members are not moved by the slaughter of innocent kindergartners, they are heartless and callous.

People hold diametrically opposed views on gun rights, and yet, the fill-in-the-blank task highlights a potentially unnerving reality—the underlying structure of both moral arguments is identical. Both sides genuinely believe that they are protecting children (Lerner, 2016). The gun rights debate highlights a counterintuitive insight from a new theory of moral psychology, the Theory of Dyadic Morality (TDM). While liberals and conservatives hold opposing moral views, the Theory of Dyadic Morality suggests that liberals and conservatives nonetheless share the



same underlying harm-based moral mind (Schein & Gray, 2015, 2017). Appeals to a common moral denominator might provide a way to lessen the demonization of opponents in this highly polarized time.

This dissertation addresses a putatively simple, yet potentially intractable question: how can we reduce political animosity? Applying insights from the Theory of Dyadic Morality, I propose that highlighting shared moral values should decrease the dehumanization of ideological opponents, and increase our willingness to engage in contentious dialogue.

### **Political Polarization**

Ideological polarization is a prevalent and increasingly salient challenge in the United States (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979; Sunstein, 2002). Partisans on both sides of the political aisle cloister themselves into moral echo-chambers (Frimer, Skitka, & Motyl, 2017; Motyl, 2016). Our towns, friendships, and online social networks are politically segregated (Motyl, Iyer, Oishi, Trawalter, & Nosek, 2014; Poteat, Mereish, Liu, & Nam, 2011; Barberá, Jost, Nagler, Tucker, & Bonneau, 2015).

From our isolated bubbles, we demonize ideological opponents (Brandt et al., 2016; Motyl, 2016; Keltner & Robinson, 1996). In the 2016 election, liberals were cast as “nasty women” and “bad hombres;” conservatives were “deplorables.” Although this political trash talk is nothing new (Geer, 2006), nationally representative samples have found that political animosity has consistently grown since the 1980s, and is at its peak in the 2016 election (Iyengar & Krupenkin, 2018). In our political climate, we have come to a point where we feel anxious at the thought of even engaging with ideological opponents (Kouzakova, Harinck, Ellemers, & Scheepers, 2014). Why is affective polarization so high?

## **Moralization of Political Disagreements**

People disagree about a lot of issues: UNC or Duke, Coke or Pepsi, creamy or crunchy peanut butter. Few issues evoke such persistent polarization and out-group villainizing and dehumanizing as ideological disagreements (Crawford, Modri, & Motyl, 2013; Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005). One reason why political differences might be so entrenched is because many political issues are moralized (Ryan, 2014). Just think of all the issues that divide our country: abortion rights, physician-assisted suicide, gay marriage, gun rights, trans-bathroom use, immigration. When we debate issues such as abortion or gay marriage, we do not debate their economics or their feasibility. We frequently debate their morality.

Unlike other attitudes, moralized attitudes are viewed as objective (Goodwin & Darley, 2008, 2012; Nichols & Folds-Bennett, 2003), universal (Wainryb, Shaw, Langley, Cottam, & Lewis, 2004), and authority independent (Turiel, Killen, & Helwig, 1987; Wisneski, Lytle, & Skitka, 2009). Moralizing attitudes is a double-edged sword (Skitka & Morgan, 2009). Moral convictions motivate political engagement like voting and activism (Ryan, 2014; Skitka & Bauman, 2008; Skitka & Wisneski, 2011; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2012). However, moral convictions are also more resistant to compromise and tradeoffs (Ginges, Atran, Medin, & Shikaki, 2007; Tetlock, Kristel, Beth, Green, & Lerner, 2000), often leading to greater intolerance (Brandt et al., 2016; Skitka et al., 2005). There is no compromising with moralized attitudes. Those who disagree with us are misguided, lazy, ignorant, immoral or driven by ideological biases (Ross & Ward, 1997; Ditto & Koleva, 2011). In the extreme case of terrorism, anyone who disagrees with one's worldview is labeled as inferior infidels and traitors to God (Kruglanski & Fishman, 2009) and they are stripped of their right to life (Bar-Tal, 1998).

If our political divides are also moral divides, then it might help to take the time to understand moral diversity before trying to tackle political animosity. Why is it that liberals and conservatives are split by morality? Do liberals and conservatives have fundamentally different moral values, or is there something that unites them?

### **Explaining Moral Diversity**

Liberals and conservatives often seem like they are from different planets. This is especially true when it comes to cultural war issues such as gay marriage, abortion, the death penalty and stem-cell research. Why do liberals and conservatives differ so starkly? There are several psychological models that explain moral diversity (Haidt, 2012; Janoff-Bulman & Carnes, 2013; Rai & Fiske, 2011). Each of these models starts with the premise that liberals and conservatives disagree about deeply held moral issues. The models differ on the question of what causes this moral pluralism, whether there is anything unifying morality, and what to do to bridge the moral divide.

Janoff-Bulman and colleagues' Model of Moral Motives (MMM) proposes that moral diversity emerges from differences in underlying approach-avoidance motivations (Janoff-Bulman, 2009; Janoff-Bulman & Carnes, 2013). Liberals are more likely to be approach-oriented, and this translates into a prescriptive morality ("what SHOULD you do") and a focus on enabling altruism. As conservatives are more avoidance motivated, their morality is more proscriptive (what should you NOT do) and focused on maintaining social order. These different moral motives are evident in how liberals and conservatives construe group-focused morality. According to MMM, both liberals and conservatives care about the well-being of society, but their motivational orientation transforms this shared concern into different behaviors. Liberals protest in the streets to promote social justice and universal human rights. Conservatives focus

on social order and rally around closing borders and enforcing obedience. Social justice and social order pull against each other which is why political debates are so acrimonious. We all value our community's well-being, but distinct moral motives lead to the endorsement of opposing policies. The MMM suggestion for solving political divides is to recognize that both social order and social justice are necessary for a successful free society. Social justice is needed for cooperation; social order is needed for coordination (Carnes & Janoff-Bulman, 2016). Therefore, people across the moral aisle should try to work together to balance each others moral concerns (Carnes & Janoff-Bulman, 2016).

Rai & Fiske's relational model theory (Rai & Fiske, 2011) argues that moral diversity exists because morality is situated within different types of relations. Anthropological research suggests that there are generally four types of relationships: communal sharing, authority ranking, equality matching, and market pricing (Fiske, 1991). Rai & Fiske (2011) propose that four different moral motives maintain these relationships: unity, hierarchy, equality, and proportionality (Rai & Fiske, 2011). Moral disagreements result from competing groups relying on different relational models. For example, perspectives on health care depend on whether you view society in terms of a communal sharing or market pricing relationship. In the first, we have a collective responsibility to ensure the welfare of each member of our community. In the latter, proportionality motives dictate that benefits correspond to input or contributions. Moral compromise is off the table as the moral motives of unity and proportionality are incommensurable in this situation. To understand political opponents requires understanding the relational lens through which they are viewing a moral act.

By far, the most prominent model of morality is Haidt and colleagues' Moral Foundations Theory (MFT). MFT proposes that a diversity of moral values emerge from a set of

five (or six; Iyer, Koleva, Graham, Ditto, & Haidt, 2012) innate, yet culturally shaped moral foundation of “intuitive ethics” (Haidt, 2012). According to MFT, liberals and conservatives rely on fundamentally different moral foundations (Graham & Haidt, 2012; Haidt, 2012). Liberals have a developed moral sense for harm and fairness (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009). These are the “individualizing” foundations and they are focused on concerns regarding personal autonomy, and protecting individual rights. Conservatives have an expanded moral repertoire, valuing loyalty, obedience, and purity in addition to harm and fairness (Graham et al., 2013). These “binding” foundations concern social order and deference to the natural order of the world. Importantly, binding concerns are claimed to be moralized independent of their perceived harmfulness (Haidt, 2001; Horberg, Oveis, Keltner, & Cohen, 2009). Conservatives moralization of same-sex marriage is driven by concerns for the sanctity of marriage, and what is natural. It is therefore immune to considerations of harm (Scott, Inbar, & Rozin, 2016).

According to MFT, American culture wars are persistent and nasty (Koleva, Graham, Iyer, Ditto, & Haidt, 2012) because liberals are “colorblind.” They have “finely tuned sensors for harm and injustice but are blind to other moral dimensions” (Haidt quoted in Jacobs, 2009). Conservatives and moderates are fairly accurate in predicting liberals moral values, at least as measured by the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (Graham, Nosek, & Haidt, 2012). Liberals, however, consistently underestimate conservatives’ appreciation of harm (Graham et al., 2012). For example, one study found that liberals underestimate conservatives responses to items like, “one of the worst things a person could do is hurt a defenseless animal.” Conservatives and liberals both share a harm foundation, which is why conservatives can accurately predict liberal moral values. However, liberals lack a developed moral sense for purity. When liberals see conservatives unmoved by the struggles of drug addicts, the homeless, and gay couples, they are

left with the conclusion that conservatives are callous, if not outright villains (Haidt, 2012). Liberals are exhibiting a “moral empathy gap” (Ditto & Koleva, 2011). By not sharing the same moral values, they are unable to understand opponents’ perspectives. The key for solving American cultural wars is for liberals to work harder to understand conservative’s expanded moral compass. Political animosity will persist until liberals can recognize moral values other than harm.

### **A Common Denominator of Morality?**

People hold a plethora of values: rationality, punctuality, respect, honesty, humility, etc...(Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987). Some of these values (e.g., honesty, fairness) are moralized; others are not (e.g., industriousness). The Theory of Dyadic Morality (TDM) argues that what moralizes certain values is their association with harm (Schein & Gray, 2017). Liberals and conservatives might agree that patriotism is good, but the reason only conservatives believe flag burning is a morally reprehensible act of treason is because they value social order (Janoff-Bulman & Carnes, 2013). They see dissent as harmful to society and the soldiers protecting it (Gray, Schein, & Ward, 2014). Moral diversity emerges because perceptions of harm are shaped by one’s worldview (Shweder, 2012), informational assumptions (Turiel, Hildebrandt, Wainryb, & Saltzstein, 1991), motivations (Janoff-Bulman & Carnes, 2013), and relationship context (Rai & Fiske, 2011). People have different values, but the values that are moralized all share one common feature: harm.

Although moral judgments are special in many ways (Skitka, Washburn, & Carsel, 2015), they are essentially just categorization judgments. Just as we can ask “is a penguin a member of the category Bird,” when we form moral judgments we ask “is ‘X’ a member of the category immorality.” Due to its universality (Mikhail, 2007), evolutionary importance, and affective

salience, we proposed that harm is at the heart of the moral template (Schein & Gray, 2015). This harm-based moral template is formed by the combination of three features: an intentional agent, a causal act, and a damaged patient, or in other words, Agent+Cause+Patient = HARM. Each element of this equation can be filled with a multitude of entities. Agents are often adults, but God (Gray & Wegner, 2010) and corporations (Rai & Diermeier, 2015) can also fill this role. Causal acts can involve hitting, insulting, or even defiling. Children are the most prototypic victims (Schein, Goranson, & Gray, 2015), but souls and social order can also be damaged. A cacophony of moral diversity can emerge simply from different combinations of the same basic building blocks.

Several of our studies suggest that harm is a common denominator unifying moral pluralism (Gray et al., 2014; Schein & Gray, 2015). In one study, we asked participants to rate which of two acts were more immoral (e.g. is it more immoral to eat a dead dog, or burn an American flag). After making their decision, participants then rated which act was more harmful, unfair, disloyal, disobedient, and gross. For both liberals and conservatives, harm was the best predictor of which act was seen as more immoral. If there was no common denominator of morality, then harm concerns and purity concerns should be incommensurable (Goodwin, 2017). There would be no metric to make a comparison. However, people are able to make comparisons, and they make these comparisons based on harm. In another study, participants were asked to categorize 60 different actions, including non-canonically harmful acts (e.g. gossip, pornography, disobedience) on their immorality, harmfulness, and unpleasantness as quickly as they could (Schein & Gray, 2015). For both liberals and conservative, harmfulness significantly predicted immorality across all actions even when controlling for unpleasantness (a

control for both negative valence, and word length). The fact that harm can organize relative immorality suggests that harm is common feature throughout these actions.

A more direct way of assessing whether harm is active across moral concerns is to just ask participants if they believe an act causes victims. When asked, participants report seeing victims in harmless violations, such as burning an American flag, eating a dead dog, and homosexuality (DeScioli, Gilbert, & Kurzban, 2012). These victims include the self, other people, and society in general (Gray et al., 2014). One concern is that people are acting like lawyers, creating victims merely to justify their views (Haidt, 2001). To counteract this concern, we placed some participants under cognitive load while they were rating the harmfulness of different acts. We expected that load would have no impact. Instead, we found that participants under load were more likely to report victims. This suggests that people automatically perceive victims in even harmless violations. In another study (Gray et al., 2014), we paired pictures of children with descriptions of a variety of harmful (e.g. kick a dog), impure (e.g. rub feces on Bible, defile a corpse), and neutral acts (e.g. ride a bus). Participants rated the children as sadder (a proxy of suffering) after both the harmful and impure acts, but not after the neutral acts. Even putatively harmless violations such as watching animals copulate, led participants to automatically perceive greater suffering in the world. Whether liberal or conservative, people intuitively see harm when they believe an act is immoral, even if that act lacks objective harm.

### **Counteracting Political Animosity: Appealing to Common Moral Values**

The Theory of Dyadic Morality (TDM) and Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) both suggest that American culture wars emerge as a result of a moral empathy gap. Blind to the other's moral reasons, we view opponents as irrational and immoral. As an analogy, consider this example offered by Ditto & Koleva (2011). Imagine that you have a neighbor with a strong dog



phobia (Ditto & Koleva, 2011). She insists that you pay for a costly fence to prevent your dog from ever attacking her. Not sharing this fear, you view her insistence as malicious and completely irrational. Only when you appreciate her fear does her insistence on paying for a wall make any sense. To counteract this gap, both theories encourage individuals to try to understand what drives opponents' views. For MFT, this requires accepting that liberals and conservatives have fundamentally different moralities. For TDM, this requires recognizing that opponents genuinely perceive harm, just in different locations. Appeals to both MFT and TDM could be at least partially effective in reducing political animosity as both views directly challenge our naïve realism (Ross & Ward, 1997) that opponents are devoid of moral reasons.

I predict that focusing on overlapping moral values such as harm should be particularly effective in reducing political animosity as it not only challenges the narrative that political opponents are evil, but also has the added benefit of highlighting similarity. Decades of research in intergroup processes has found that similarities can blur the boundaries between “us” and “them” and decrease conflict (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2014) and increase attraction (Byrne et al., 1971). Appeals to similarity also counteract dehumanization (McDonald et al., 2017), one of the key contributors to intergroup animosity and intergroup violence (Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008; Haslam, 2006). Appeals to value similarity should also be particularly effective because morality is central to person perception (Goodwin, 2015), and because the focus on moral values directly addresses the key source of our political divisions (Brandt et al., 2016). We can all get along at the Thanksgiving dinner table by focusing on our shared love of turkey. However, this shared focus is likely only a temporary bandage. Even if we can all agree on food preferences, familial peace dissolves as soon as the topic of politics is broached. Nothing was

solved by diverting the discussion. Directly challenging the source of our political conflict should lead to more lasting changes.

### **Current Research**

This paper proposes that an appeal to moral similarity can decrease dehumanization and increase willingness to engage in political discourse. Replicating and extending previous work that finds a link between perceived value differences and political prejudice (Brandt, Reyna, Chambers, Crawford, & Wetherell, 2014) **Studies 1-3** examine whether perceived differences in morality correlate with people's unwillingness to engage in dialogue with political opponents. I predict that perceived moral dissimilarity will correspond with greater unwillingness to engage in political dialogue with opponents (Studies 1 & 2). However, a belief that liberals and conservative are both motivated by perceptions of harm should correspond with decreased dehumanization, and an increase openness to engage in dialogue even when controlling for general optimism (Study 3).

**Studies 4** examines how people perceive political opponents' moral reasons. I predict that participants will perceive attitudinally similar others as motivated by genuine internal moral reasons, but will be less likely to perceive this motivation in opponents. I further predict that this downplaying of opponents' moral reasons will correspond with increased dehumanization of opponents, and decreased willingness to engage in dialogue.

Finally, **Studies 5-8** test whether a moral similarity intervention can decrease dehumanization and increase willingness to engage in dialogue. I predict that appeals to moral similarity will decrease dehumanization, more than appeals to other types of similarity, and this reduction in dehumanization which correspond with a greater willingness to engage.

## **CHAPTER 2: STUDY 2**

People avoid listening to political opponents even when this avoidance comes at monetary costs (Frimer et al., 2017). However, not all issues are equally divisive. We might not want to talk with our disagreeing friend about abortion, but maybe we are open to chatting about education issues, a topic where the moral divide is less stark. In this first study, I tested what factors correspond with a greater willingness to discuss specific political topics. I predicted that the more we see someone's particular view as reflecting fundamentally different moral values, the less likely we are to want to listen to that view.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

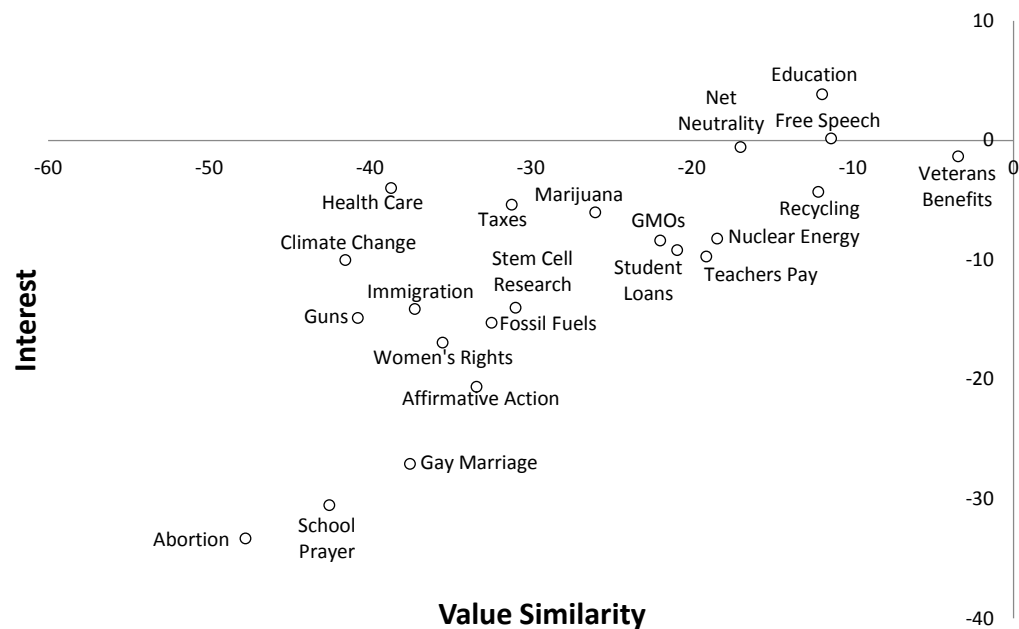
A total of 210 participants were recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (mTurk) to participate in the study in April 2017. Since replications might be impacted by the political climate outside the survey setting, throughout this paper I will note when data collection occurred. All participants were from the United States, and all had HIT approval ratings over 95%. In this and all later studies, participants who failed the instructional attention check (Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko, 2009) were eliminated from the data prior to any data analysis. Twenty participants were excluded for failing an informational manipulation check, leaving 190 participants ( $M_{\text{age}} = 36.78$ ,  $SD = 12.84$ , 54% male, 60.5% liberal, as measured by a binary scale, 48.9% liberal as measured by a selection of 1-3 on a 7 point political scale ranging from 1, strongly liberal, to 7, strongly conservative).

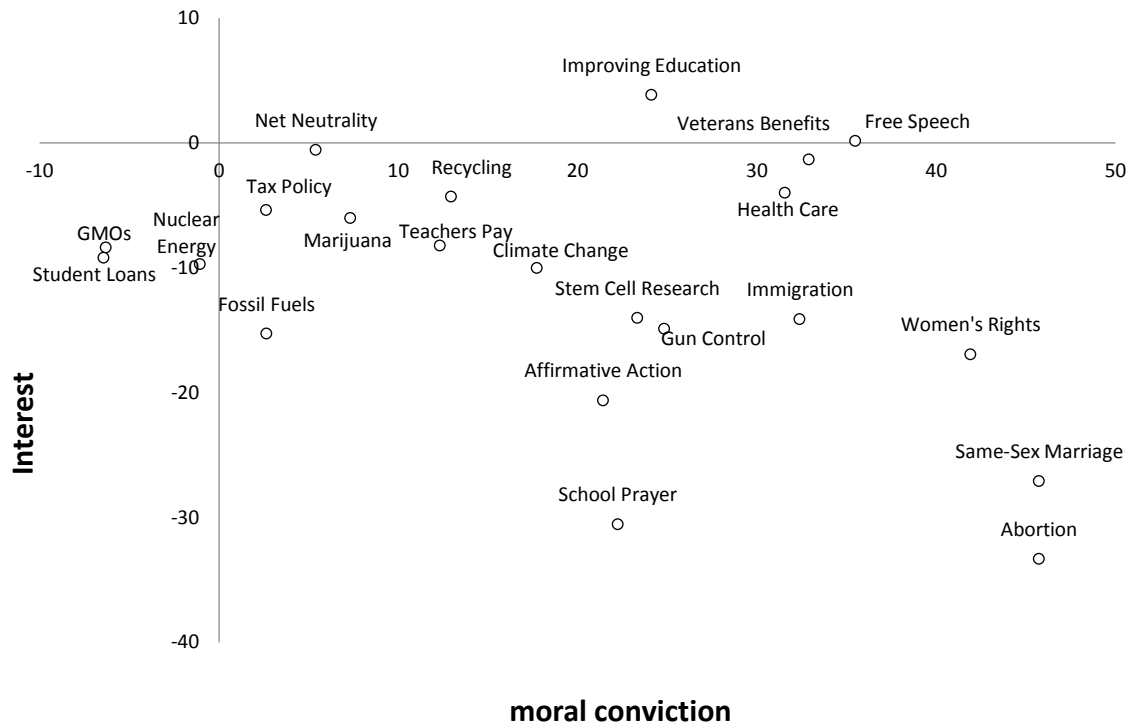
## Procedure

After indicating their political leanings (liberal/conservative), participants read a statement about Jeff, a political opponent who holds strong party-line views. They then saw a list of 22 political issues (abortion, same sex marriage, gun control, marijuana legalization, tax policy, immigration, climate change, Improving Education, Health Care, Women's Rights, Free Speech, Fossil Fuels, Nuclear Energy, Recycling Genetically Engineered Foods, Internet Neutrality, Stem Cell Research, School Prayer, Veterans Benefits, Student Loans, Affirmative Action, Teachers Pay). On a -100 to 100 scale, participants rated their *interest in listening* to the topics: "how interested are you in hearing Jeff discuss the following topics?" (Frimer et al., 2017). To provide an anchor for the interest in listening question, we also asked people interests for performing a range of acts (taking out the trash, having a tooth pulled, reading a really boring newspaper article; standing in a line-up for 20 minutes, and finding a \$10 bill. On a -100 to 100 scale, participants also rated *view similarity*: "how similar are your views to Jeff's on the following topics;" *moral value similarity*: "To what extent does Jeff's view on the following topics reflect fundamentally different or fundamentally similar moral values than you;" and *moral conviction*: "To what extent are your beliefs about the following issues a moral stance?" As a replication of previous research (Frimer et al., 2017), we also included a question about *relationship harm*, "Imagine that Jeff is an acquaintance. How would hearing about Jeff's opinions on the following topics impact your relationship with Jeff?" and perceived emotional state, "How would hearing from Jeff about the following topics make you feel?" Questions blocks were presented in random order. At the end of the study, participants reported basic demographic information.

## Results

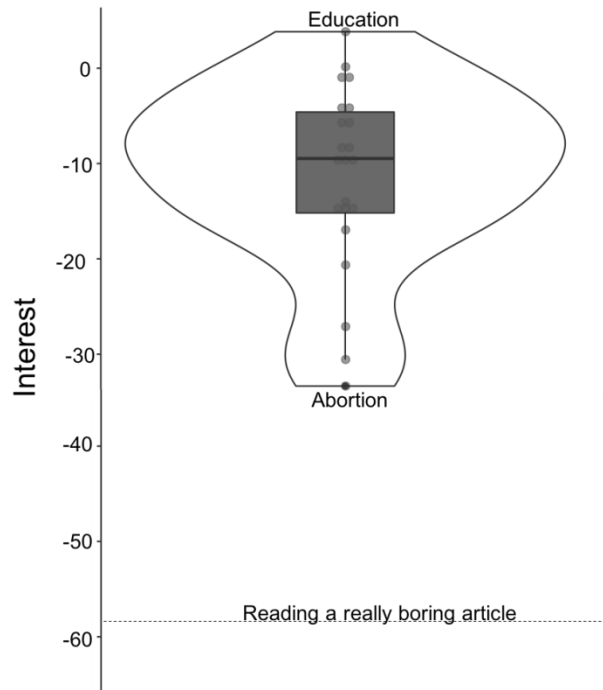
*Collapsed.* Collapsing ratings on each item resulted in significant correlations between interest in listening and similarity of moral values  $r = .77, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.51, .90]$ , view similarity  $r = .78, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.53, .90]$ , relationship harm,  $r = .80, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.56, .91]$ , and emotions,  $r = .81, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.58, .92]$  and a trending correlation with moral conviction,  $r = -.38, p = .08, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.69, .05]$ . These correlations suggest that perceived similarity, including similarity of moral values, strongly predicts increased willingness to listen to political opponents discuss a political issues. On average, people are much more likely to listen to a political opponent discuss an issue like education, where moral values are not seen as too dissimilar, than gay marriage, where the moral divide is seen as much greater.





**Figure 1.** There is a strong correlation between perceived value similarity on a particular topic, and interest in listening to a political opponent discuss that topic (top). The correlation with moral conviction is weaker (bottom). The ratings on free speech can illustrate why there's a weaker correlation with moral conviction. Relative to other topics, people on average hold a moral conviction about free speech, but the topic is not hugely divisive, and people are still willing to discuss free speech.

It is worth noting from the start that although people on average were uninterested in listening to political opponents, this disinterest was relatively moderate. Discussing abortion, the issue that held least interest  $M = -33.34$ ,  $SD = 66.34$ , was still rated on average as significantly less uninteresting than reading a particularly boring newspaper article,  $M = -58.35$ ,  $SD = 40.98$ ,  $t(189) = -4.82$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\text{cohen's } d = -.35$ , 95% CI of mean diff  $[-35.2, 14.8]$ . See Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Interest in hearing a political opponent discuss various political topics. The violin plot reflects the density of topics at each interest level. On average most people were only mildly disinterested in listening to political opponents discuss different topics, and even discussing abortion was seen as more interesting than reading a really boring article.

**Multi-Level Modeling.** A multilevel model with value similarity, person mean centered and grand mean centered entered as fixed factors predicting willingness to listen showed that within an individual, value similarity significantly predicted willingness to listen,  $B = .23$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $t(3989) = 13.71$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI [.19, .26], suggesting that within an individual, each 10 point increase in moral similarity on average corresponds to a roughly 2 point increase in willingness to listen to a political opponent. To detangle between-person effects and within-person effects of perceived value similarity on interest in listening, I also looked at value similarity as a level 2 predictor. People who on average perceived greater moral similarity across political topics showed more interest in listening to political opponents discuss different moral issues,  $B = .51$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $t(188) = 6.04$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI [.35, .68].

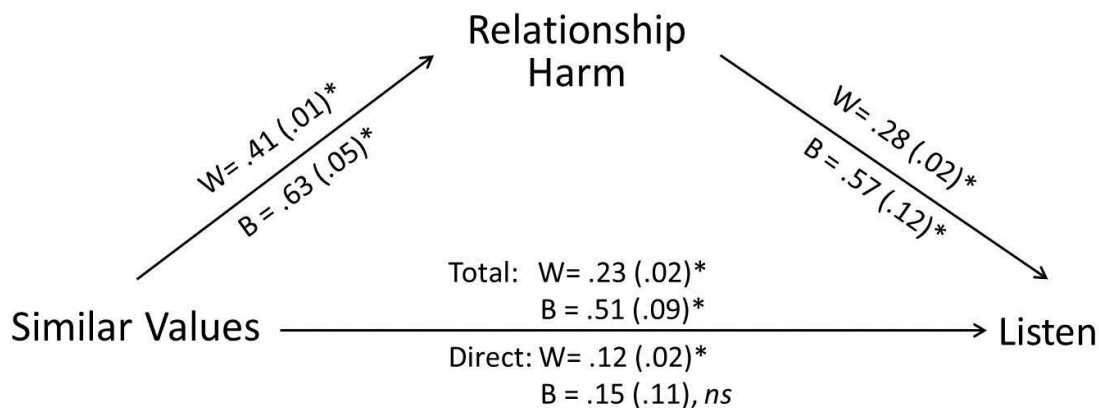
An important question is whether within an individual value similarity predicts willingness to listen above general similarity. Therefore, value similarity, and view similarity, person mean centered, were entered as fixed effects in a random intercept multi-level model predicting interest in listening to a political opponent. Both value similarity,  $B = .12$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $t(3988) = 5.48$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.08, .16], and view similarity  $B = .17$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $t(3988) = 7.91$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.13, .21], significantly predicted interest in listening, suggesting that value similarity is a significant predictor of willingness to listen above just general similarity. These parameters should be interpreted with caution, however, as the fixed effects between value similarity, and general similarity correlated highly at  $-.64$ . These effects remain similar when moral conviction,  $B = .06$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $t(3987) = 4.71$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.04, .09] was entered into the model.

*Political Differences?* Although I had no a priori prediction about politics, conservatism, grand mean centered, significantly predicted interest in listening, with more conservative corresponding with more willingness to listen  $B = 3.70$ ,  $SE = 1.89$ ,  $t(188) = 1.96$ ,  $p = .05$ , 95% CI [-.03, 7.43]. While this data did suggest an asymmetry in political aversion, I am hesitant to over-interpret this finding as indicating a larger psychological reality about liberals or conservatives. It is possible that this is a relic of the issues selected (a concern I tried to mitigate by selecting 22 political topics). This analysis was also exploratory, and the sample size is relatively small. Finally, even if there are differences, this data was collected in the first few months of the Trump administration, and it is possible that in the age of Trump, liberals are less willing to listen to discussions on any topics

*Value Dissimilarity and Relationship Harm.* Previous research suggests that one reason people avoid discussing political attitudes with political opponents is the fear that this discussion



would hurt their relationship (Frimer et al., 2017). It is possible that discussing moral dissimilarities would harm the relationship more than discussing less morally divisive issues. Therefore, as an additional, exploratory analysis, I tested whether value dissimilarity corresponded to a greater perceived risk of harming a friendship relationship, and whether this risk to relationship mediates the connection between value dissimilarity and interest in listening to political opponents. To conduct this analysis, I ran a multi-level mediation model using the Sobel method, following the guidelines of Bauer & Curran (2013). The previously mentioned within person total effect of value similarity on listening was partially mediated by relationship harm, indirect effect,  $B = .06$ ,  $SE < .001$ ,  $z = 582.87$ ,  $p < .001$ , proportion mediated effect = .49, though there remained a significant direct effect of value similarity,  $B = .12$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $t(3988) = 6.10$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI [.08, .15]. At the between-subject level, there was a full mediation with the indirect effect,  $B = .36$ ,  $SE < .001$ ,  $z = 107.23$ ,  $p < .001$ , PME = .70 and direct effect  $B = .15$ ,  $SE = .11$ ,  $t(187) = 1.36$ ,  $p = .18$ , 95%CI [-.07, .38]. Full mediation pathway at both the within subject and between subject data can be found in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** The more a topic reflects different moral values, the more it is seen as having the potential to harm a friendship if discussed, which in turn predicts a greater unwillingness to listen to a political opponent discuss the topic. Relationship harm only partially mediated the effect within-subject, but did fully mediate the effect between-subject. Here, “W” refers to within-subject effect, “B” refers to between subject effects. \*  $p < .001$

## **Discussion**

Although people are generally uninterested in listening to political opponents, this disinterest is higher for topics that highlight different moral values. Statistically, this connection between moral dissimilarity and disinterest in listening is significant even when controlling for general view similarity and it is partially accounted for by perceived harm to relationship. This data suggests that perhaps focusing on issues with more moral common ground could start a dialogue more easily than starting with issues that are most morally divisive. Before testing any intervention that could increase interest in bipartisan dialogue, I sought to replicate this general pattern with a different methodology.

## CHAPTER 3: STUDY 2

In January 2018, the New York Times editorial team asked Trump supporters to make their best case for Trump, and on January 18<sup>th</sup>, the New York Times devoted their entire letter-to-the-editor section to 16 letters from Trump supporters

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/17/opinion/trump-voters-supporters.html>). In the introduction to these letters, the editorial team noted that the reason they were publishing these letters was to help “readers who agree with us better understand the views of those who don’t.”

The New York Times’ decision to publish these letters was met with harsh criticism. On the following day, the paper published a series of responses under the title “Furor Over a Forum” (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/18/opinion/trump-voters.html>). Respondents noted, sarcastically “perhaps The Times should devote an entire editorial page to flat earthers;” the New York Times should “start talking to people who have their heads in reality, who understand the problems of the world, who understand the harm an inept administration can do” and should not “waste vital newspaper space, in these perilous times, to people who aid and abet a president, and his congressional lackeys, who are destroying all that is noble and just about America.” Most succinctly, one respondent noted “Please don’t ever do that again.”

These responses highlight a few potential reasons why people might be opposed to even listening to political opponents. One reason is moral dissimilarity. For example, one respondent noted Trump supporter’s failure to have empathy to others, “My question for them: Did you ever consider the impact of Mr. Trump’s policies on others’ lives?” and respondents painted

opponents “as among the ‘deplorables’ — people who are racist and xenophobic.” Another potential reason that people might be uninterested in engaging with political opponents is factual dissimilarity. A repeated theme in the responses is that Trump supporters are living in a different reality. For example, one respondent noted, “educated supporters don’t seem to see the primordial muck on which everything Trumpian is based.” This failure to establish a shared reality likely hinders successful conversation (Van Bavel & Pereira, 2018), which could also predict a disinterest in engaging in dialogue.

Inspired by these sets of letters, in the second study we presented liberal participants with the New York Time’s pro-Trump op-eds, and looked at predictors of willingness to engage in dialogue with the letter writers. We tested three predictors: the extent to which the letter writer had shared moral values, had a shared factual reality, and relatedly was intelligent. In addition to having theoretical importance, (Van Bavel, & Pereira, 2018), the inclusion of shared factual reality also served as a control for general similarity. Intelligence was included as a general control for global positive assessment of the letter writer. We predicted that greater perceptions of moral overlap would predict willingness to engage in political discourse over and above perceptions of factual overlap and even when controlling for a more general positivity assessment.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

One hundred participants completed the study on February 15, 2018 through mTurk. Since we were looking at perceptions of Trump participants, the study was restricted to liberal participants. To make sure that people were not lying about being liberal in order to participate in the study, the advertisement for the study did not mention political orientation, but only

participants who said that they were liberal on the first page of the survey could complete the study. Six participants failed the informational attention check, leaving 94 participants ( $M_{\text{age}} = 34.70$ ,  $SD = 10.26$ , 44.7%female).

### *Procedure*

Participants were randomly shown 6 of the 16 New York Times pro-Trump letters published on January 18, 2018. After reading each letter, participants answered five questions. Participants saw a series of seven increasingly overlapping circles with the words self and other, and were asked to select which circle alignment best represents the overlap in general moral values, and the overlap of factual understanding of the world, with 7 indicating highest overlap. They also answered “how intelligent is this individual,” as well as “how willing would you be to have a discussion with this individual” and “how persuasive is this op-ed,” all on a 1 (not at all) to 7 (very) scale. Persuasiveness was included for exploratory reasons to test if willingness to listen has different predictors than persuasiveness. Finally, participants answered demographics questions.

### **Results**

A multilevel model with moral overlap, factual overlap, and intelligence, all person mean centered and entered as a fixed factor predicting willingness to engage in dialogue showed that moral overlap significantly predicted willingness to engage in dialogue,  $B = .38$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $t(463) = 6.15$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.26, .51] in addition to factual overlap  $B = .14$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $t(463) = 2.53$ ,  $p = .01$ , 95% CI [.03, .25], and intelligence,  $B = .37$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $t(463) = 8.76$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.29, .46]. Intelligence was included initially as a control for global positive assessment of the letter writer, but out of concern that intelligence was accounting for most of the effect of factual overlap explaining why moral overlap is a stronger predictor, I reran the model excluding

intelligence. Moral overlap still significantly predicted willingness to engage in dialogue,  $B = .52$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $t(464) = 7.91$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI [.39, .65], as did factual overlap,  $B = .29$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $t(464) = 5.06$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI [.18, .40]. Persuasiveness showed a similar pattern with moral overlap,  $B = .28$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $t(463) = 4.66$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI [.16, .39], factual overlap  $B = .26$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $t(463) = 4.88$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI [.15, .36], and intelligence,  $B = .32$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $t(463) = 7.80$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI [.24, .40], all significantly predicting perceived persuasiveness of the letter.

## **Discussion**

Listening to political opponents is challenging. This study found that the more liberals saw a pro-Trump individual as holding overlapping moral values, the more likely they were to have a conversation with that person, even when controlling for similarity in factual understanding of the world, and the perceived intelligence of the other person. Of note – since this study relied on a nested design, we are not just finding that people who are generally more likely to view political opponents in a more positive light are more likely to engage in dialogue. Rather, this data suggests that within individuals, greater moral and factual overlap each independently predicted a greater willingness to engage in dialogue with a Trump supporter.

## CHAPTER 4: STUDY 3

The next study directly examined the relationship between different meta-beliefs about the nature of moral disagreements and people's attitudes toward political opponents, and their willingness to engage in political discourse. I predict that the belief that all people share the same underlying moral values, consistent with predictions from the Theory of Dyadic Morality, will correlate strongly with decreases in dehumanization of political opponents and will correlate with a greater willingness to engage in political dialogue. Importantly, I predict that these correlations should remain significant even when controlling for general positivity, as measured by optimism in other people and in the world, and faith in other people.

### Method

#### *Participants*

Two hundred and three students completed the study through mTurk on February 24, 2018.<sup>1</sup> Eight participants failed an informational manipulation check, leaving 195 participants ( $M_{\text{age}} = 39.05$ ,  $SD = 11.66$ , 47.2% female, 48.7% liberal).

#### *Procedure*

Participants first rated their agreement with two statements, presented in random order, on a 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree) scale. One statement reflected an approach to moral diversity and highlighted how liberals and conservatives have fundamentally different moral values:

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<sup>1</sup> This study was initially run in January 2017, in the first week of the Trump presidency, with slightly different DVs, but similar results. The study was rerun to increase coherence with the later studies.

Liberals and Conservatives have different moral opinions because they have fundamentally different moral minds. The foundations of their moral beliefs are different, with liberals motivated by one set of core values, and conservatives motivated by another.

The other statement reflected a TDM approach to moral diversity, highlighting shared moral values.

Liberals and Conservatives have different moral opinions, but fundamentally share the same moral mind. Liberals and conservatives both care about preventing harm and protecting others, but they see harm in different locations.

Participants then rated a series of questions about political opponents in random order. These questions included two measures of dehumanization, Bastian eight item dehumanization measure (refined and cultured; Responsive and warm; Rational and logical; Mechanical and cold, like a robot; Lacking in self-restraint, like an animal; Unsophisticated; Open-minded, like they can think clearly about things; Superficial, like they have no depth), presented on a seven point scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely so), reverse coded where appropriate so higher values indicate greater and the explicit dehumanization scale ( $\alpha = .87$ ), descent of man (Kteily, Bruneau, Waytz, & Cotterill, 2015). Both dehumanization measures specified that they were about an average political opponent. Participants also rated four questions measuring their willingness to have a dialogue with a political opponent, rating how willing they would be to “Have a general discussion with a political opponent;” “Have a discussion about politics with a political opponent;” “Attempt to understand a political opponent's viewpoints;” and “Spend time with a political opponent” ( $\alpha = .90$ ). To make sure that the meta-ethical statements were



clear, I also included two questions that were restatements of the meta-ethical beliefs “My political opponents have fundamentally different moral values than me,” and “My political opponents have different opinions, but fundamentally share the same underlying moral values.”

To control for general optimism, participants then rated their agreement on three statements ( $\alpha = .82$ ): “I believe that other people are fundamentally good;” “I believe that the world is a fundamentally good place;” and “I believe that other people are fundamentally selfish (reverse scored).” Finally, participants reported demographics as in study 1.

## Results

A within subject t-test showed that on average participants endorsed the different moral minds perspective ( $M = 4.94$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ) more than the similar moral minds perspective ( $M = 4.28$ ,  $SD = 1.63$ ),  $t(194) = 3.58$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.30, 1.03].

The belief that liberals and conservatives have similar moral minds correlated with a greater willingness to engage in dialogue,  $r(194) = .26$ ,  $p < .001$ , less dehumanization,  $r(194) = -.40$ ,  $p < .001$  and a view of a more evolved political opponent,  $r(194) = .25$ ,  $p < .001$ . Even when partialing out general optimism, believing that liberals and conservatives both value harm had a positive correlation with willingness to engage in dialogue  $r_p(192) = .16$ ,  $p = .02$ , a negative correlation with dehumanization,  $r_p(192) = -.29$ ,  $p < .001$ , though the evolution of man scale no longer reached significance,  $r_p(192) = .12$ ,  $p = .09$ .

Endorsement of the statement that liberals and conservatives had fundamentally different moral minds did not correlate significantly with willingness to engage in dialogue,  $r(194) = -.06$ ,

$p = .40$ ,<sup>2</sup> though it did correlate with greater dehumanization,  $r(194) = .31, p < .001$ , and the evolution of man dehumanization measure,  $r(194) = -.29, p < .001$ , correlations that remained significant even when partialing out general optimism, dehumanization:  $r_p(192) = .24, p < .001$ , and evolution of man:  $r_p(192) = -.22, p < .002$ .

*Political Differences?* Politics did not significantly correlate with either dehumanization measure, either meta-ethical positions, willingness to engage in politics, or general optimism, all  $r_s < |.14|$ .

## Discussion

This study suggests that the claim made by Moral Foundations Theory, that liberals and conservatives have fundamentally different moral minds, is generally more intuitive, but the belief that liberals and conservative share the same moral mind, though see harm different, corresponds with more positive attitudes toward opponents, as measured by decreased dehumanization, and a greater willingness to engage in dialogue, a correlation that remains significant, though smaller, even when partialing out general optimism. Politics did not correlate with any of the key dependent variable.

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<sup>2</sup> I did expect a negative correlation between endorsement of MFT and willingness to engage in dialogue, and so as a purely exploratory analysis, I looked at the correlation between moral dialogue, and the claim that political opponents have fundamentally different moral values than me. There was a significant correlation,  $r(194) = -.20, p = .005$ , though that correlation was no longer significant when controlling for general optimism,  $r_p(192) = -.08, p = .27$ .

## CHAPTER 5: STUDY 4

The Theory of Dyadic Morality predicts that political animosity occurs in part because liberals and conservatives fail to recognize the legitimate perceptions of harm held by moral opponents. This study directly tests a potential asymmetry in how people attribute the political views of political opponents and political allies. I predict that participants will perceive those sharing their political view as motivated by perceptions internal moral reasons, including harm, but will view moral opponents as motivated by ignorance, stupidity, or malice (Ward & Ross, 1997). Recognizing that an opponent genuinely believes that they are helping society should predict decreased dehumanization, and increased willingness to engage in dialogue.

### Method

#### *Participants*

In April 2017, 575 participants completed the study though 67 failed the attention check, leaving 508 participants (48.5% liberal, 53% female,  $M_{age} = 37.60$ ,  $SD = 12.10$ ).

#### *Procedure*

Participants first selected which of this time three political issues they felt most strongly about, from abortion, same-sex marriage, and the death penalty, and then answered questions regarding moral conviction (Skitka et al., 2005), and the permissibility of the issue. Next, participants were randomly assigned to the agreement or disagreement condition. Since some of our predictions specifically focus on correlations within the disagreement condition, we collected more participants in the disagreement condition, at a 2:1 rate. Participants then read the following description of Jeff:

Jeff is a 35-year-old male, who strongly believes that \_\_\_\_ is morally im/permissible. On the weekends he volunteers with an organization that does community outreach and helps spread awareness about why is wrong/acceptable.

Following this vignette, participants answered a series of questions gauging why they believed Jeff held this view on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) scale. Questions included four harm reasons, : “Jeff genuinely believes that \_\_\_\_ is morally permissible because prohibiting/allowing for \_\_\_\_ would result in better outcomes,” “Jeff believes that by opposing/supporting \_\_\_\_ he is legitimately helping others,” “Jeff genuinely believes that forbidding/allowing \_\_\_\_ would be harmful to society,” and “Jeff genuinely believes that forbidding/allowing \_\_\_\_ would be harmful to individuals.” Other reasons were derived from Ward & Ross’s (1997), naïve realism research and included idiocy (unintelligent, uninformed) , immorality (internal moral compass, immoral), and external reasons (upbringing, biased by political ideology). Participants then answered an eight item dehumanization scale (Bastian & Haslam, 2010), and then three questions gauging interest in engaging in dialogue: “I would be willing to listen to Jeff discuss his perspective on this topic;” “I would be willing to learn the reasons why Jeff hold his perspective on this topic;” and “I would NOT be interested in listening to Jeff talk about this topic” (reversed scored). Participants completed demographics information at the end of the study.

## Results

*Moral Reasons.* Consistent with predictions, political opponents’ views were seen as less likely to stem from perceptions of harm ( $\alpha = .80$ ),  $M = 4.78$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ , than attitudinally similar individuals’ views,  $M = 5.92$ ,  $SD = .99$ ,  $t(506) = 9.84$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI: [.92, 1.38]. The other belief attributions (upbringing, unintelligent, immoral, moral compass (reversed), uninformed,

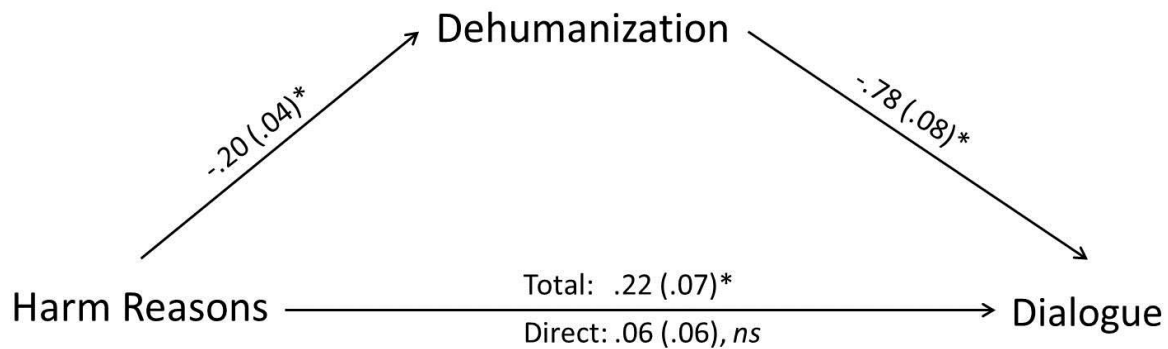
biased), were combined into a single Naïve Realism measure,  $\alpha = .81$ . Political opponents views were ascribed to more reasons consistent with naïve realism  $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ , than attitudinally similar views,  $M = 2.27$ ,  $SD = .80$ ,  $t(506) = -17.85$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI [-1.91, -1.53].

*Dehumanization.* Moral opponents were dehumanized ( $\alpha = .92$ ) to a greater degree,  $M = 3.95$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ , than attitudinally similar individual,  $M = 2.22$ ,  $SD = .84$ ,  $t(506) = -17.85$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI [-1.92, -1.54].

*Dialogue.* People were much less willing to engage in dialogue ( $\alpha = .92$ ) with someone different than themselves,  $M = 4.32$ ,  $SD = 1.81$  than someone similar,  $M = 5.64$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ,  $t(506) = 8.25$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI [.99, 1.62].

*Moral Reasons and Dialogue.* It is not really that surprising that we are less willing to engage in a dialogue with someone different from ourselves. The key question is whether recognition of opponents' perceptions of harm corresponds with a greater willingness to engage in dialogue. Within perceptions of opponents, there was a small, but significant correlation between dialogue and harm reasons  $N330$   $r(328) = .17$ ,  $p = .003$ , naïve realism  $r(328) = -.28$ , and dehumanization,  $r(228) = -.50$ . To explore potential mechanisms of the correlation between attributions of moral reasons and dialogue, I ran a mediation analysis within the opponent condition. There was a significant total effect, total effect = .22,  $SE = .07$ ,  $t(328) = 3.03$ ,  $p = .003$ , 95%CI [.07, .36], though this effect was fully mediated by dehumanization, direct effect = .06,  $SE = .06$ ,  $t(327) = .94$ ,  $p = .35$ , 95%CI [-.07, .19], indirect effect = .16, *Boot SE* = .04, 95%CI [.08, .24]. Harm decreased dehumanization,  $b = -.20$ ,  $t(328) = -4.54$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI[-.29, -.11], and dehumanization corresponded to a decreased willingness to engage in dialogue,  $b = -.78$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $t(327) = -9.87$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI [-.93, -.62].

*Political differences?* Within perceptions of political opponents, politics did not significantly correlate with attribution to harm reason,  $r(328) = .06$ ,  $p = .32$  or interest in dialogue,  $r(328) = .08$ ,  $p = .13$ , though there was a significant correlation with dehumanization  $r(328) = -.18$ ,  $p = .001$ . This correlation with dehumanization suggests that greater conservatism has a small correspondence with decreased dehumanization of political opponents.



**Figure 4.** Attributing opponent political views to moral reasons, such as harm-based reasons, corresponds with a, increase in willingness to engage in dialogue, a relationship fully mediated by dehumanization of political opponents. Attribution to moral reasons corresponds to a decrease in dehumanization, and decreases in dehumanization corresponds with an increase in willingness to engage in dialogue. \* $p < .01$ .

## Discussion

This study found that people see political opponents as having less internal moral reasons including harm-based reasons, for their political attitudes than attitudinally-similar others. Rather, we attribute opposing political beliefs more to illegitimate, even immoral reasons, such as ignorance, religious upbringing, and a lack of moral compass. Furthermore, this failure to attribute political beliefs to legitimate reasons corresponds with an increase in dehumanization, which in turn corresponded to a decrease willingness to engage in political discourse. Viewing political opponents as devoid of moral reasons negatively predicted willingness to engage in dialogue.

All the studies reported thus far are limited by the correlational nature of the data. Since all the studies are correlational, it is possible that we are just capturing general negativity. People who are more pessimistic are less likely to attribute genuine reasons for opponent perspectives. Manipulating perceptions of opponents having moral reasons should increase willingness to engage in dialogue.

In the following set of studies, I tested whether appeals to moral similarity can decrease dehumanization and increase people's willingness to engage with political opponents. Across X studies, I test whether appeals to moral similarity decrease dehumanization and increase willingness to engage in dialogue relative to perceived dissimilarity (study 5), a control condition (Studies 6a and 6b), and an irrelevant and a more robust similarity (Study 7 and 8).

## CHAPTER 6: STUDY 5

If perceived differences in values is a strong negative predictor of interest in listening, perhaps perceptions of shared moral values centered in harm/care will decrease political animosity, and increase willingness to engage in dialogue. In the following study, participants were told that they would engage in political dialogue with a political opponent, who they learned was either highly similar in moral values, most especially the value placed on harm and care, or highly dissimilar in moral values, especially as it relates to loyalty, authority, and purity. We predicted that perceptions of moral similarity would decrease dehumanization, and increase interest and actual engagement in political discourse.

### **Method**

#### *Participants*

101 mTurk participants completed the study on January 10, 2018. Twenty-three participants were removed from analysis for failing either the informational attention check, or the recall on similarity/dissimilarity or correctly recalling the political party of the fake mTurker, leaving a total of 78 participants ( $M_{age} = 36.29$ ,  $SD = 10.82$ , 71.8% liberal as measured by binary scale, 61.5% on continual, 53.8% female).

#### *Method*

Participants were told that they would be completing a dialogue with another mTurker. After entering in the name they wanted to use for the chat, participants reported their political ideology (“politically, which perspective best represents your views: Liberal/Conservative”) and three short surveys, a personality survey (BFI – Short Form), a morality survey (MFQ – short)



and a food preference survey under the cover story that they were waiting to match the participant with another mTurker. After completing the surveys, they learned that they will be paired with Jeff who is described as a Conservative/Liberal (always the opposing political party) and then learned that Jeff had 87% (Dis)Similarity in general moral values. Participants in the similarity condition read,

Based on the results from The Moral Foundations Questionnaire-Short Form, a scientific measure of moral values, you have a **HIGH SIMILARITY (87%) in General Moral Values** with Jeff. You agree on the value placed on protecting others from harm, and both of you care deeply about the well-being of your communities.

Participants in the dissimilarity condition read,

Based on the results from The Moral Foundations Questionnaire-Short Form, a scientific measure of moral values, you have a **HIGH DISSIMILARITY (87%) in General Moral Values** with Jeff. You disagree on the importance placed on loyalty, respect for authority and the importance of purity.”

To reinforce the main manipulation, participants also saw a pie chart labeled “87% (Dis)Similarity in Moral Values.” The language in the moral (dis)similarity intervention was specifically designed to be consistent with Moral Foundations Theory, as it claimed that liberals and conservatives overlap in their concern about harm and care, but are divided on issues such as purity, authority, and loyalty.

Following the manipulation, students then completed a series of questions assessing interest in listening to Jeff talk about politics (as measured by the 22 item measure in the pilot), and dehumanization of Jeff using Bastian & Haslam’s 2010 8-item scale, presented this time on a

0 (Not at All) to 100 (Very Much) scale. As a manipulation check, they then completed a series of questions gauging similarity between themselves and others. Adopting the Inclusion of Other in Self Scale (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992), participants saw a series of overlapping circles, and were asked to select which one represented overlap in personality, political ideology, and general moral values. They were also asked to rate how much they liked Jeff.

They then completed the “dialogue” with Jeff. Participants were told that in the first round, they were going to discuss opinions on abortion. Knowing that Jeff would see their response, they were told to describe their view and why they hold this view. After “waiting” for Jeff’s response, participants then saw Jeff’s answer.

Conservatives were told that Jeff wrote,

I am very much in favor of individual rights. A woman should have a right to control her body. Allowing anyone else to dictate what happens to her is wrong. I believe a woman should have total control over her own body, no matter what.

Liberals were told that Jeff wrote,

A human (even fetus) life shouldn't be extinguished just because it's inconvenient. You make a choice, accept the consequences. There are so many couples out there that would LOVE to take your baby and raise it as their own.

These responses were adapted from qualitative data collected in 2015. It is possible that these texts are different in persuasiveness, but this should not impact our findings, as our main dependent variables occur prior to this response, and our main interest is between similarity conditions, not politics. So all liberals saw the same response, and the key question is whether liberals who first heard about similarity would engage in more dialogue, relative to the participants who learned that they were different from Jeff.

As a secondary measure of engagement, participants were then asked to write any comments they have for Jeff. They were specifically told to write each comment or question on their own line, and to write at least one comment.

Finally, as a further measure of political engagement, participants were asked whether they wanted to engage in another round of dialogue to be entered into a drawing for \$2. If they selected yes, they moved on to the following screen indicating that Jeff turned down the offer, but they would still be entered into a drawing for \$2.

At the end of the study, participants completed demographics information, manipulation checks, and had the opportunity to provide feedback on the study. We had some initial concern about the believability of the chat paradigm, so gave participants a space at the end of the study to write their comments. No participants mentioned concern over the existence of Jeff, though a few participants questioned whether there was actually a dialogue, since they did not have the chance to actively debate Jeff.

## **Results**

*Dehumanization.* The eight dehumanization questions were averaged ( $\alpha = .94$ ) into a single dehumanization score, with higher scores indicating greater dehumanization. Perceptions of moral similarity significantly decreased dehumanization of the political opponent,  $M = 34.01$ ,  $SD = 19.44$ , relative to the dissimilar condition  $M = 60.30$ ,  $SD = 18.88$ ,  $t(76) = 6.05$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI of diff [17.64, 34.94], cohen's  $d = 1.37$ .

*Political Engagement.* This study included 4 different operationalizations of political engagement: 1) the 22-item interest in listening question, 2) the amount of words used in the initial response, 3a) the number of words and 3b) number of comments offered as a response to

Jeff's position, and 4) their binary response regarding whether they wanted to engage in another round of dialogue with Jeff.

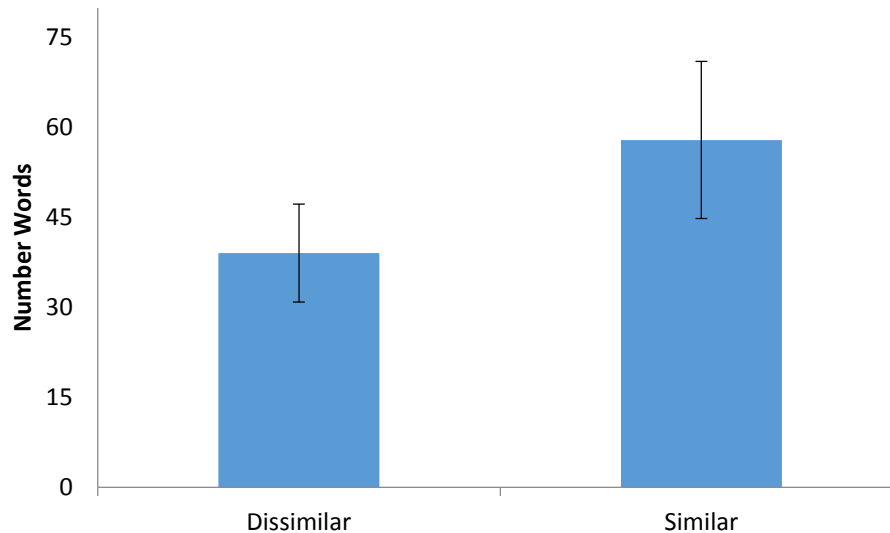
With regard to the interest DV, interest in listening to each topic was averaged into an overall interest score. Interest in listening to Jeff did not differ significantly by condition, similar:  $M = -2.86$ ,  $SD = 52.68$ , dissimilar:  $M = -5.33$ ,  $SD = 46.21$ ,  $t(76) = -.22$ ,  $p = .83$ .

One objective measure of engagement of dialogue is the number of words people used when conveying their view of abortion to Jeff. An independent sample t-test found that significantly more words were used on average by participants in the similar condition,  $M = 57.95$ ,  $SD = 42.26$ , than in the dissimilar condition,  $M = 39.08$ ,  $SD = 25.64$ ,  $t(76) = 2.37$ ,  $p = .02$ , 95% CI of diff [3.01, 34.74],  $d = .54$ . Number of words is a metric susceptible to outliers, so we cut the outliers in each condition, and the analysis remained significant, with participants in the moral similar case on average using more words,  $M = 53.74$ ,  $SD = 33.27$ , than those in the dissimilar condition,  $M = 36.76$ ,  $SD = 21.56$ ,  $t(74) = 2.63$ ,  $p = .01$ , 95% CI mean diff [4.097, 29.87],  $d = .60$ .

Another measure of political engagement is the total number of comments and total number of words in those comments participants used in response to Jeff's answer. Here there was no significant difference in the number of comments left with similar,  $M = 2.98$ ,  $SD = .224$ , not differing significantly from dissimilar,  $M = 2.37$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ,  $t(76) = 1.48$ ,  $p = .14$ , 95% CI [- .21, 1.43]. While these measures did not meet significance, it is possible that they will with a larger sample size.

The final measure of political engagement, interest in engaging in another round of dialogue, did not differ significantly by condition, with 55% of participants in the similarity

condition opting in, and 58% opting in in the dissimilar case, Mann-Whitney  $U = 738.00$ ,  $Z = -.26$ ,  $p = .80$ .



**Figure 5.** Number of words used in initial comment on abortion to political opponent by similarity condition. Error bars indicate 95% CI.  $p = .02$ .

*Similarity.* Independent samples t-test suggests that the manipulation of similarity increased perception of moral overlap (a question that was essentially a manipulation check) similar:  $M = 4.50$ ,  $SD = 1.73$ , dissimilar:  $M = 2.34$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ,  $t(76) = 6.15$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI [1.46, 2.85]  $d = 1.40$ . Similarity had a trending impact on perceived political overlap,  $M = 2.30$ ,  $SD = 1.57$ , dissimilar:  $M = 1.66$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ,  $t(76) = 1.96$ ,  $p = .05$ , 95%CI [.01, 1.30]  $d = .44$ .

*Relationship between Dehumanization and Engagement.* One question is whether reduced dehumanization corresponds with an increase in willingness to engage in political discourse. Therefore, we first looked at the correlation between dehumanization and each of the engagement measures. Dehumanization had a negative correlation with overall interest in listening to the topics,  $r(76) = -.29$ ,  $p = .009$ , but did not correlate with any of the other measures of engagements,  $r$ s between  $-.08$  and  $.005$ ,  $ps > .56$ . This lack of correlation suggests perhaps that the behavioral results found in this initial study may be capitalizing on noise.

## **Discussions**

This study suggests that the questionnaire manipulation of moral similarity was an effective manipulation of perceived moral similarity, and manipulating moral similarity is effective at reducing the dehumanization of political opponents. There was some mixed evidence that the similarity manipulation also increases willingness to engage in dialogue. There are several limitations to this initial intervention study. First, there was no real control condition in the study. It is therefore unclear if similarity decreased dehumanization, or dissimilarity increased dehumanization relative to a baseline. Additionally, the word count behavioral measure is potentially open to idiosyncrasies. Even though I removed the outliers, it is still possible that with only a little under 40 participants per cell, the difference in word count is due to a few more verbose participants in one condition. Given the potential for false positives, we sought to replicate the effect, with a control condition, and a larger sample size in the following study.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: STUDY 6a

The following study was a replication and extension of Study 5, that tested whether increasing perceived moral similarity increase people's willingness to engage in dialogue and dissimilarity decreases willingness relative to a control condition.

### Method

#### *Participants*

On January 17, 2018, 299 participants completed the study through mTurk, of which, 32 failed an attention check (informational or manipulation check), leaving a total of 267 participants ( $M_{age} = 35.69$ ,  $SD = 10.69$ , 64.4% liberal as measured by binary scale, 55.4% on continual, 52.9% female).

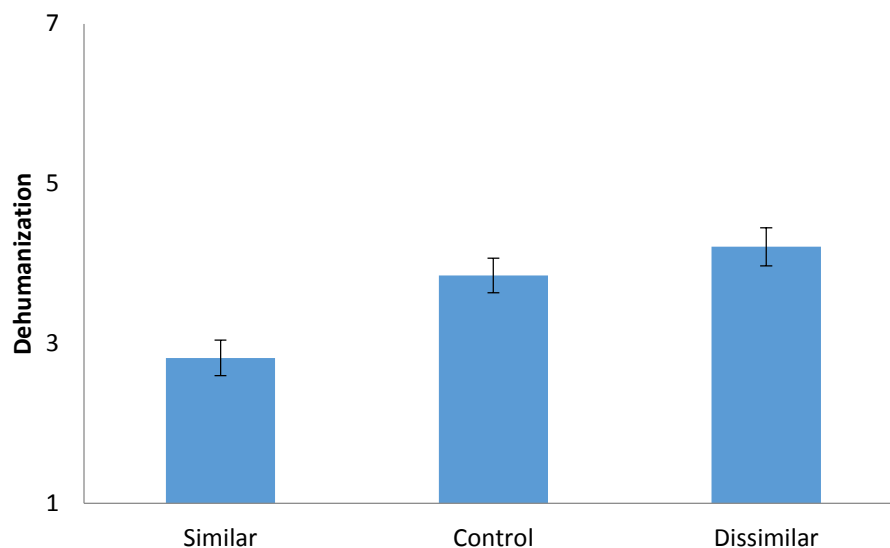
#### *Procedure*

This study was a replication of the previous chat room study with only a few key changes. The main change was that a third, neutral condition was added. In this condition, participants learned only that Jeff was a conservative/liberal. There was no associated pie chart in this condition. To shorten the study, we removed the interest in listening 22 items, and only used the first section of the MFQ short form. As an alternative measure of self-report political engagement, we added a four-item engagement scale, as used in Study 3. This scale asked how willing they would be to 1) have a general discussion with this individual, 2) have a discussion about politics with this individual, 3) attempt to understand this individual's viewpoints, 4) spend

time with this individual. This time, the willingness to engage questions were all answered on a 6 point scale from Very Unwilling to Very Willing.

## Results

*Dehumanization.* As before, the eight dehumanization questions, now measured on a 7-point scale, were averaged ( $\alpha = .89$ ) into a single dehumanization score, with higher scores indicating increased dehumanization. A between subject ANOVA revealed a significant effect of similarity,  $F(2,264) = 37.52, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .22$ . Post-hoc analysis showed that the morally similar condition significantly decreased dehumanization,  $M = 2.82, SD = 1.07$ , relative to the control condition,  $M = 3.85, SD = 1.11, p < .001$ , Mean Diff = 1.04, SE diff = .17, 95%CI of diff [.71, 1.37], and relative to the dissimilar condition  $M = 4.21, SD = 1.14, p < .001$ , Mean Diff = 1.39, SE diff = .17, 95%CI [1.06, 1.72]. Dissimilarity significantly increased dehumanization relative to the control, Mean Diff = .36,  $SE = .17, p = .03$ , 95%CI [.03, .68].



**Figure 6.** Similarity significantly reduced the dehumanization of a political opponent relative to a neutral no information control condition, whereas dehumanization increased dehumanization. Error bars indicate 95% CI. Study 6a.

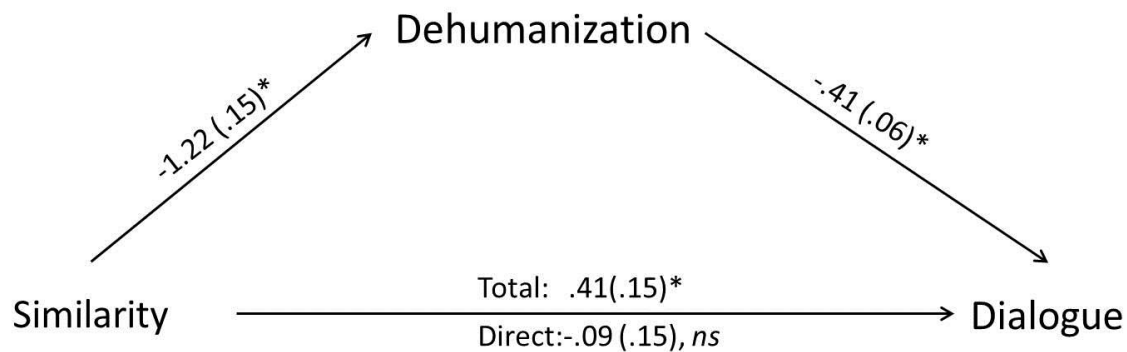


*Political Engagement.* The four self-report political engagement questions were averaged to form a political engagement self-report measure ( $\alpha = .90$ ). A between subject ANOVA revealed a significant effect of similarity,  $F(2,264) = 3.87, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .03$ . Post-hoc analysis revealed that similarity increased self-report interest in engaging in political dialogue,  $M = 4.70, SD = 1.04$ , relative to the control condition,  $M = 4.31, SD = 1.15, p = .03$ , Mean Diff =  $-.39, SE = .17$ , 95%CI of Diff  $[-.72, -.05]$ , and relative to the dissimilar condition,  $M = 4.27, SD = 1.20, p = .01$ , Mean Diff =  $-.43, SE = .17$ , 95%CI  $[-.77, -.10]$ . The dissimilar and control conditions did not differ significantly, Mean Diff =  $-.05, SE = .17, p = .79$ , 95%CI  $[-.38, .29]$ .

As a behavioral measure of engagement, I next examined the total number of words used in the initial abortion writing task, the number of words used in the response to Jeff, as well as the number of comments left, and whether the participant wanted to engage in another round of dialogue. Failing to replicate the previous study, the number of words used in the initial writing task did not differ significantly by condition,  $F(2,264) = .50, p = .61, \eta_p^2 = .004$ , nor did the number of words used in response to Jeff's comment,  $F(2,264) = .64, p = .53, \eta_p^2 = .005$ , or the number of comments left in response to Jeff,  $F(2, 264) = .17, p = .84, \eta_p^2 = .001$ . The more dialogue question also did not vary significantly by condition, chi-square (2, 267 participants) = 2.25,  $p = .33$ .

*Similarity Manipulation Check.* Affirming the effectiveness of my manipulation, there was a significant overall effect of similarity on moral overlap,  $F(2,267) = 55.84, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .30$ . Post-hoc analysis showed that the similar condition was indeed seen as having more moral overlap  $M = 4.41, SD = 1.58$ , than the control condition,  $M = 3.03, SD = 1.53, p < .001$ , Mean Diff =  $-1.38, SE = .22$ , 95%CI of diff  $[-1.82, -.94]$ , and the dissimilar condition,  $M = 2.11, SD = 1.28, p < .001$ , Mean Diff =  $-2.31, SE = .22$ , 95%CI  $[-2.74, -1.87]$ .

*Dehumanization and Engagement.* Dehumanization inversely correlated with self-report political engagement,  $r(269) = -.42, p < .001$ . Dehumanization also fully mediated the effect of the moral similarity condition vs. control and dissimilar on increase willingness to engage in dialogue. While similarity condition (0 = control, dissimilar; 1 = similar \* though effect remains significant comparing to just control) did predict increase in willingness to listen, total effect = .41,  $SE = .15, t(265) = 2.77, p = .006, 95\%CI [.12, .70]$ , this was fully mediated by dehumanization, direct effect =  $-.09, SE = .15, t(264) = -.57, p = .57, 95\%CI [-.39, .21]$ , indirect effect = .50,  $Boot SE = .10, 95\%CI [.32, .71]$ . Similarity decreased dehumanization,  $B = -1.22, SE = .15, t(265) = -8.33, p < .001, 95\%CI [-1.50, -.93]$ , and this lower dehumanization in turn increased willingness to engage in dialogue,  $B = -.41, SE = .06, t(264) = -7.16, p < .001, 95\%CI [-.53, -.30]$ .



**Figure 7.** Mediation path model showing that dehumanization fully mediated the link between moral similarity and an increase willingness to engage in dialogue. For similarity, 1 = similar; 0 = control, dissimilar. \*  $p < .01$ .

### Discussion

This study suggests that perceived similarity decreases dehumanization relative to a control, and this decreased dehumanization corresponds to an increase in self-report willingness to engage in dialogue. Inconsistent with Study 5, there was no difference in the behavioral measures of political engagement. It is possible that the behavioral measure is undermined by the

task itself. In this study, I manipulated perceived moral similarity, and then ask general questions about willingness to engage in dialogue. However, when participants get to the behavioral political engagement section, the manipulation of similarity might be overshadowed by the focus on abortion, an issue that is highly divisive in the United States. The shift in focus to abortion might have wiped away the entire similarity manipulation. As an additional test of the effectiveness of the similarity manipulation to shift actual dialogue behavior, I reran study 6a with a different chat paradigm.

## CHAPTER 8: STUDY 6b

### Moral Similarity and General Notes to Opponents

This study was a replication of the previous study with a new behavioral dependent variable. Instead of a dialogue on abortion, participants wrote general opening notes to a political opponent. I once again predict that moral similarity will decrease dehumanization, and increase willingness to engage in a dialogue relative to a control and a dissimilar condition.

#### Method

##### *Participants*

On January 25, 2018, 301 participants completed the study through mTurk. Twenty-eight participants were removed for failing an attention check, leaving 273 participants ( $M_{age} = 35.89$ ,  $SD = 10.52$ , 59.7% liberal as measured by binary scale, 53.1% on continual, 48.4% female).

##### *Procedure*

Study 5b was a replication of Study 5a, with the main difference being the design of the chat room activity. After completing the questionnaires, getting info on Jeff, and answering the dehumanization, similarity, and willingness to engage measures, participants saw a screen labeled “Political Conversations.” On that page, participants were told “you will now start your conversation with Jeff. Please start the conversation below by writing a note to Jeff. Spend some time telling Jeff about yourself, and any general thoughts you might have relating to politics.” To shorten the study, and maintain the cover story, 5 seconds after participants submitted their initial note, they read “The other participant has closed the survey already. Please complete demographic information to get your completion code, and you will still receive full pay.”

## Results

*Dehumanization.* As before, the eight dehumanization questions, now measured on a 7-point scale, were averaged ( $\alpha = .90$ ) into a single dehumanization score, with higher scores indicating increased dehumanization. A between subject ANOVA revealed a significant effect of similarity,  $F(2,270) = 42.58, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .24$ . Post-hoc analysis showed that moral similarity,  $M = 2.83, SD = 1.09$ , significantly decreased dehumanization relative to the control,  $M = 3.85, SD = 1.07$ , Mean Diff =  $-1.02, SE = .16, p < .001$ , 95%CI of diff[ $-1.33, -.71$ ], and relative to the dissimilar condition,  $M = 4.26, SD = 1.06$ , Mean Diff =  $-1.44, SE = .16, p < .001$ , 95%CI [  $-1.33, -.71$ ]. Dissimilarity significantly increased dehumanization relative to the control, Mean Diff =  $.41, SE = .16, p = .01$ , 95%CI [ $.09, .73$ ].

*Political Engagement.* Similarity condition did not have a significant overall-effect on self-report political engagement,  $F(2,270) = 2.46, p = .09, \eta_p^2 = .02$ . Despite the lack of overall effect, I still conducted a post-hoc analysis, which suggested that Similarity,  $M = 4.46, SD = 1.17$ , significantly increased willingness to engage in dialogue relative to dissimilar,  $M = 4.06, SD = 1.32$ , Mean Diff =  $.40, SE = .18, p = .03$ , 95%CI [ $.04, .75$ ]. The control condition,  $M = 4.31, SD = 1.15$ , did not differ significantly from the other two conditions. The number of words used in the political notes did not differ significantly by condition,  $F(2,270) = .46, p = .63, \eta_p^2 = .003$ .

*Similarity.* The manipulation check of perceived moral overlap showed a significant overall effect  $F(1,270) = 68.03, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .34$ , with post-hoc analysis showing similarity effectively increasing perceived moral overlap,  $M = 4.62, SD = 1.51$ , more than the control,  $M = 2.80, SD = 1.49$ , Mean Diff =  $1.82, SE = .21, p < .001$ , 95%CI [  $1.40, 2.23$ ], and the dissimilar condition,  $M = 2.26, SD = 1.29$ , Mean Diff =  $2.37, SE = .21, p < .001$ , 95%CI[ $1.94, 2.79$ ]. The

dissimilar condition had significantly less perceived moral overlap than the control, Mean Diff =  $-.55$ ,  $SE = .22$ ,  $p = .01$ , 95%CI  $[-.97, -.12]$ .

*Dehumanization and Political Engagement.* Dehumanization inversely correlated with self-report political engagement,  $r(271) = -.47$ ,  $p < .001$ . Mediation analysis showed a significant indirect effect of  $.65$ , Boot SE =  $.08$ , 95%CI  $[.45, .89]$ , with similarity (0 = control, dissimilar, 1 = similar) decreasing dehumanization,  $B = -1.21$ ,  $SE = .14$ ,  $t(271) = -8.79$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI  $[-1.48, -.94]$ , which in turn decreased willingness to engage in dialogue,  $B = -.53$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $t(270) = -8.87$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI  $[-.65, -.41]$ . The mediation was run despite a lack of total effect (recall that the significant difference in self-report political engagement was between similar and dissimilar), total effect =  $.27$ ,  $SE = .15$ ,  $t(271) = 1.74$ ,  $p = .08$ , 95%CI  $[-.04, .57]$ , and the direct effect of similarity on engagement, once controlling for dehumanization, was negative, at  $-.38$ ,  $SE = .15$ ,  $t(270) = -2.44$ ,  $p = .02$ , 95%CI  $[-.68, -.07]$ .

## **Discussion**

This replications suggests that manipulations of perceived moral similarity decreased dehumanization relative to a control, and manipulations of moral dissimilarity increased dehumanization. Furthermore, dehumanization negatively predicted self-report willingness to engage in political dialogue. In contrast to the pattern found in Study 5, both Studies 6a and 6b failed to find a significant difference in the length of political dialogue. Null findings are challenging to interpret, and it is possible that a different behavioral measure might show greater variance by condition. Length of writing is likely highly susceptible to general individual differences in verbosity. Although the behavioral dependent variable did not replicate in this study, the effect of similarity on attitudes regarding political opponents was strong, as was the connection between dehumanization and self-report willingness to engage in dialogue.

One limitation of the last three studies is that it is unclear whether it is moral similarity per se that is decreasing dehumanization and increasing self-report willingness to engage in dialogue, or similarity in general that is the cause of the effect. Therefore, in the next two studies, I compared moral similarity with other forms of similarity to examine relative impact of appealing to morality.

## CHAPTER 9: STUDY 7

From the previous studies, it is unclear whether moral similarity uniquely reduces political animosity, or similarity itself is sufficient to reduce dehumanization (McDonald et al., 2017). It is possible that any minute form of similarity can decrease political animosity, consistent with decades of research in prejudice research, and sociological research on homophily (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001; Wynn, 2016). Any manipulation that shifts thinking from “us vs them” to “us” should be effective in increasing respect (Byrne et al., 1971). To test the relative impact of moral similarity, we rerun the moral similarity intervention study with the addition of two other non-moral similarity conditions. We predicted that moral similarity would decrease dehumanization relative to a control condition to a larger extent than a trivial similarity (shared food preferences), and stronger than even a central form of similarity (personality).

### **Method**

#### *Participants*

On January 19, 2018, 399 participants completed the study on mTurk, though 45 failed the informational or manipulations check, leaving 354 participants ( $M_{age} = 37.37$ ,  $SD = 11.67$ , 61.6% liberal as measured by binary scale, 51.4% on continual, 54.3% female).

#### *Procedure*

Similar to the previous studies, this study involved the completion of surveys at the start of the study, and then feedback about how their responses correspond to Jeff’s responses. For



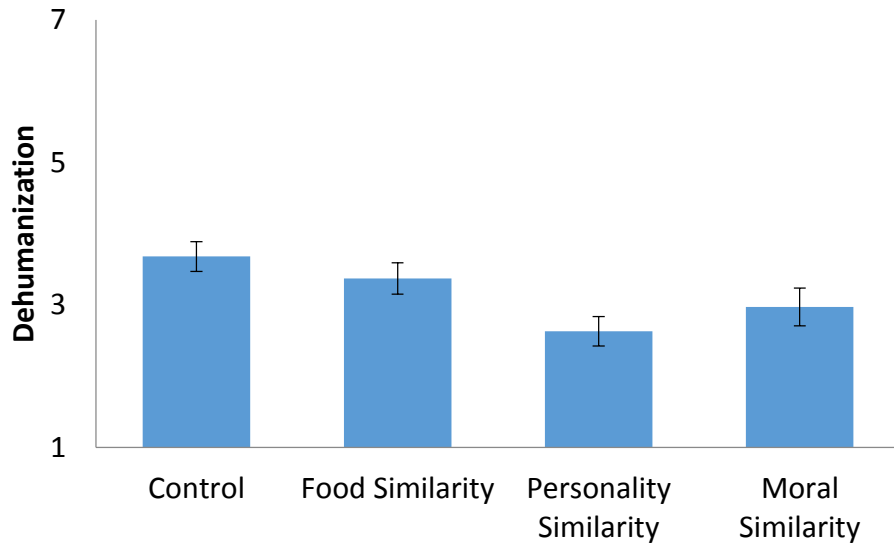
pragmatic reasons, I shortened the study and eliminated the dialogue component. Participants knew they were paired with Jeff, but were not told anything about engaging in any sort of dialogue with Jeff. I also only looked at the difference between the similarity conditions and the control, dropping the dissimilar condition.

At the start of the study, participants reported the name they'd like to use for the study, and then completed a shortened BFI and the first section of the MFQ-S, as well as a 8 item food preference questionnaire. Participants then learned that Jeff was a Liberal/Conservative (always the opposing political party), and that they had an 87% similarity in general moral values, personality, or food preferences. Participants in the control condition only learned about Jeff's political party. Participants then completed the 8-item dehumanization scale, and the self-report political engagement questions, the perceived similarity questions, and demographics.

## Results

*Dehumanization.* As before, the eight dehumanization questions, now measured on a 7-point scale, were averaged ( $\alpha = .90$ ) into a single dehumanization score, with higher scores indicating increased dehumanization. A between subject ANOVA revealed a significant effect of condition,  $F(3,350) = 16.08, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .12$ . Planned contrasts with the control condition as the referent group, showed that relative to the control condition,  $M = 3.68, SD = 1.00$ , the moral similarity,  $M = 2.97, SD = 1.26, p < .001$ , Mean Diff =  $-.72, SE = .16$ , 95%CI of diff  $[-1.03, -.40]$ , and personality similarity,  $M = 2.63, SD = .99, p < .001$ , Mean Diff =  $-1.05, SE = .16$ , 95%CI of diff  $[-1.37, -.73]$  both significantly decreased dehumanization and food similarity marginally decreased dehumanization,  $M = 3.37, SD = 1.06, p = .06$ , Mean Diff =  $-.31, SE = .16$ , 95%CI of Diff  $[-.63, .007]$ . Since we were also interested in the relative impact of different similarity strategies, we conducted post-hoc pairwise comparisons with bonferonni correction for

multiple comparisons. Moral similarity's effect was marginally stronger than the food similarity,  $p = .08$ , Mean Diff =  $-.41$ ,  $SE = .16$ , 95%CI of diff  $[-.84, .03]$ , and did not differ from the personality similarity condition,  $p = .25$ , Mean Diff =  $.33$ ,  $SE = .16$ , 95%CI of diff  $[-.10, .77]$  (note: both of these contrast is significant with the LSD adjustment).



**Figure 8.** Dehumanization rates based on similarity intervention. Personality and moral similarity both reduced dehumanization relative to control at  $p < .001$ , and food similarity reducing dehumanization at  $p = .06$ .

*Political Engagement.* The four political engagement questions were averaged into a single political engagement variable ( $\alpha = .89$ ). There was a significant effect of condition,  $F(3,350) = 3.64$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .03$ . Planned contrasts with the control condition,  $M = 4.34$ ,  $SD = 1.16$  as the referent showed that only the personality manipulation,  $M = 4.80$ ,  $SD = .90$ ,  $p = .008$ , Mean Diff =  $.46$ ,  $SE = .17$ , 95%CI $[.12, .80]$ , significantly increased willingness to engage in dialogue. Moral similarity,  $M = 4.49$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ,  $p = .37$ , Mean Diff =  $.16$ ,  $SE = .15$ , 95%CI  $[-.18, .49]$ , and food similarity,  $M = 4.28$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ,  $p = .72$ , Mean Diff =  $-.06$ ,  $SE = .17$ , 95%CI of diff  $[-.40, .27]$ , both did not differ significantly from the control condition.

*Similarity.* It is possible that the stronger effect of personality occurs in part because personality is a global signal of similarity, including moral similarity. To test for this possibility, we can see if moral overlap shifts with the personality similarity manipulation to the same degree as the morality manipulation. There was an overall effect of condition on moral overlap,  $F(3,350) = 19.15, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .14$ . Post-hoc comparisons, bonferoni adjusted suggest that relative to the control condition, both the moral similarity,  $M = 4.48, SD = 1.61, p < .001$ , Mean Diff = -1.32,  $SE = .23$ , 95%CI of diff [-1.93, -.71], and personality similarity conditions,  $M = 4.28, SD = 1.52, p < .001$ , Mean Diff = -1.12,  $SE = .23$ , 95%CI of diff [-1.73, -.50], both significantly increased perceptions of moral overlap relative to the control condition,  $M = 3.16, SD = 1.57$ , with the moral overlap not significantly stronger in the moral similarity condition than the personality condition,  $p = 1.00$ , Mean Diff = .20,  $SE = .24$ , 95%CI [-.42, .83]. Food similarity,  $M = 3.12, SD = 1.48$  did not increase perceived moral overlap relative to control,  $p = 1.0$ , Mean Diff = .04,  $SE = .23$ , 95%CI of diff [-.57, .65]. This finding suggests that the personality manipulation also functioned as a moral similarity manipulation.

*Dehumanization and Engagement.* Dehumanization once again negatively correlated with self-report political engagement,  $r(352) = .52, p < .001$ . In a mediation analysis, similarity (0 = control, 1 = all three similar conditions) had a significant indirect effect, effect = .37, Boot SE = .08, 95%CI [.22, .54], on political engagement through dehumanization. Similarity significantly decreased dehumanization,  $B = -.69, SE = .13, t(352) = -5.11, p < .001$ , 95%CI [-.95, -.42], which in turn decreased willingness to engage in dialogue,  $-.54, SE = .05, t(351) = -11.31, p < .001$ , 95%CI [-.63, -.44]. The mediation was run despite a lack of total effect, total effect = .18,  $SE = .14, t(352) = 1.30, p = .20$ , 95%CI [-.09, .46], and the direct effect of similarity was also not significant,  $B = -.19, SE = .12, t(351) = -1.51, p = .13$ , 95%CI [-.43, .06].

## **Discussion**

This study suggests that any type of similarity can decrease dehumanization of political opponents. Even similarity in food interests, a completely irrelevant form of similarity, was marginally significant in decreasing dehumanization. Inconsistent with predictions, this study did not find that moral similarity increased self-report willingness to engage in dialogue relative to the control condition. It also found that personality similarity can have just as strong of an impact in reducing political animosity as moral similarity. However, exploratory analysis also showed that the manipulation of personality similarity impacted perceived moral overlap, suggesting that the manipulation of personality effectively manipulated not only personality similarity, but also moral similarity. To better test whether moral similarity is particularly effective at decreasing dehumanization of political opponents, I ran a follow-up study that detangled moral and personality similarity.

## CHAPTER 10: STUDY 8

### Detangling Moral vs. Personality Similarity

In the next study, I tested which form of robust similarity – personality or morality, was more effective at reducing dehumanization and increasing willingness to engage in dialogue. I predicted moral similarity would be more effective at reducing dehumanization and increasing willingness to engage in dialogue relative to personality similarity.

#### Method

##### *Participants*

At the end of January 2018, 401 participants completed the study on mTurk, though 53 failed the informational or manipulation check, leaving 348 participants ( $M_{age} = 37.39$ ,  $SD = 11.86$ , 57.2% liberal as measured by binary scale, 47.4% on continual, 54.1% female).

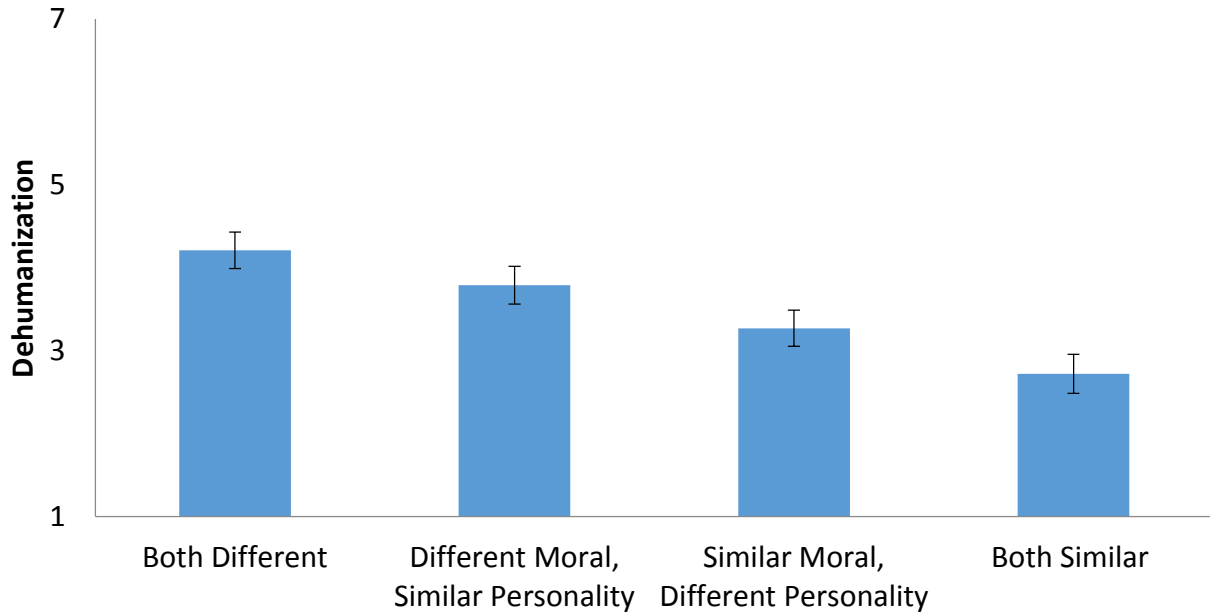
##### *Procedure*

Similar to the previous studies, participants completed surveys at the start of the study . In contrast to some of the previous studies, participants were told that they would be paired with another mTurker, but the study did not specify that a conversation would occur. After completing the surveys, participants learned that they were paired with Jeff, a person with opposing moral views who has similar or dissimilar moral values and personality. We used the texts from the previous study, though we removed the exact percentages and the pie chart to avoid the concern of having to provide two different percentages in the both similar, and both different conditions. This study used a 2x2 design, so a quarter of the participants read that they were similar on both

criteria, a quarter read that they were highly dissimilar on both, and a quarter learned that they had similar morality but dissimilar personality, and a quarter dissimilar morality, similar personality. After learning this information, participants completed the dehumanization measure, the overlap similarity questions, and the self-report political engagement questions.

## Results

*Dehumanization:* A 2x2 between subject ANOVA resulted in a main effect of Moral Similarity,  $F(1,344) = 76.31, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .18$ , and a main effect of Personality Similarity  $F(1,344) = 19.98, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .05$ . There was not a significant interaction with similar person and similar moral,  $F(1,344) = .29, p = .59, \eta_p^2 = .001$ . The key question is the comparison between the two discordant conditions. Post-hoc analysis, bonferoni adjusted showed that the different moral, similar personality condition showed significantly more dehumanization,  $M = 3.79, SD = 1.09$ , than the similar moral, different personality condition,  $M = 3.27, SD = 1.04$ , Mean Diff = .52, SE diff = .16,  $p = .006$ , 95%CI of diff [.11, .94]. The both similar condition reduced dehumanization the most,  $M = 2.72, SD = 1.12$ , all ps < .008, and the both different condition had the highest rate of dehumanization,  $M = 4.21, SD = 1.04$ , though the difference between both different, and just moral different was only marginally significant with Mean diff = .42, SE = .16,  $p = .05$  95%CI of diff [-.004, .84].



**Figure 9.** Dehumanization as a function of similarity condition. Error bars indicate 95% CI. All  $ps < .01$ , except the difference between both different and moral different. Study 8.

*Political Engagement.* A 2x2 ANOVA showed a significant main effect of Moral Similarity,  $F(1,344) = 28.72, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .08$ , and a main effect of Personality Similarity,  $F(1,344) = 17.49, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .05$ , and a marginal interaction effect,  $F(1, 344) = 3.10, p = .08, \eta_p^2 = .009$ . Post-hoc analysis showed that the significant difference ( $ps < .001$ ) was between the both different condition, where political engagement was at its lowest,  $M = 3.51, SD = 1.32$ , and the three other conditions. Both similar,  $M = 4.71, SD = 1.03$ , Same Moral, Diff Person,  $M = 4.41, SD = 1.04$ , and Different Moral, Similar Personality,  $M = 4.21, SD = 1.24$ , did not differ significantly from each other,  $ps > .08$ .

*Dehumanization  $\rightarrow$  Engagement.* To test whether decreased dehumanization corresponded to an increase in political engagement, I ran three mediation analyses, testing whether similarity decreased dehumanization, which in turn increased willingness to engage in dialogue. In the first model, I tested whether dehumanization mediated perceived moral similarity and political engagement. Dehumanization fully mediated the effect, Total Effect =

.64,  $SE = .13$ ,  $t(345) = 5.01$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI [.39, .90], Direct Effect = .22,  $SE = .13$ ,  $t(345) = 1.67$ ,  $p = .10$ , 95%CI[-.04, .47], indirect = .43,  $Boot SE = .09$ , 95%CI [.27, .64]. Moral Similarity decreased dehumanization,  $B = -.97$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $t(346) = -8.29$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI [1.20, -.74], and dehumanization decreased self-report willingness to engage in dialogue,  $B = -.44$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $t(345) = -8.16$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI[-.55, -.33], ration indirect: total = .67.

Dehumanization also partially mediated the link between personality similarity and willingness to engage in dialogue, total effect = .49,  $SE = .13$ ,  $t(346) = 3.76$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI [.23, .75]; Direct effect = .30,  $SE = .12$ ,  $t(345) = 2.54$ ,  $p = .01$ , 95%CI [.07, .54], indirect = .19,  $SE = .06$ , 95%CI [.08, .32]. Personality similarity decreased dehumanization,  $B = -.41$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $t(346) = -3.27$ , 95%CI [-.66, -.16],  $p = .0012$ , and dehumanization decreased self-report willingness to engage in dialogue,  $B = -.45$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $t(345) = -9.14$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI [-.55, -.36].

A more specific question is exploring the difference between the two discordant conditions. Even though there was no initial total effect, total effect = -.15,  $SE = .17$ ,  $t(183) = -.88$ ,  $p = .38$ , 95% CI[-.47, .18], and also no direct effect, direct effect = .09,  $SE = .16$ ,  $t(182) = .57$ ,  $p = .57$ , 95% CI [.22, .40], there was a significant indirect effect, indirect effect = -.24,  $Boot SE = .10$ , 95% CI [-.46, -.08], with diff morality, similar personality increasing dehumanization relative to similar morality, different personality,  $B = .52$ ,  $SE = .16$ ,  $t(183) = 3.34$ ,  $p = .001$ , 95%CI [.22, .83], and dehumanization negatively predicting political engagement,  $B = -.45$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $t(182) = -6.28$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI [-.60, -.31].

## Discussion

Imagine two people: you disagree with both people about politics, but one person has a similar personality as you, but different moral values. Another person has similar moral values as you, but a different personality. Which do you hold a more positive attitude about? This study



suggests that people dehumanize the similar moral, different personality person less than the different moral, similar personality individual. However, any form of similarity, even in the form of similar personality, different morality, increased participants' willingness to engage in dialogue relative to the both different condition.

## **CHAPTER 11: GENERAL DISCUSSION**

Across eight studies that rely on both correlational and experimental methodology, I found that perceived moral differences predict dehumanization of political opponents, and this dehumanization corresponds with a decreased willingness to engage in bipartisan dialogue. Study 1 found that participants were less interested in discussing political issues when those issues involved moral disagreements. Similarly, Study 2 found that liberals were more willing to have a discussion with a Trump supporter, when they saw an overlap in moral values with that supporter. Study 3 found that the endorsement of the belief that liberals and conservatives have shared moral values, but simply see harm differently, correlated with willingness to engage in dialogue, and lower dehumanization, even when controlling for general optimism. In contrast to predictions, endorsement of the claim that liberals and conservatives have fundamentally different moral values, did not correlate with willingness to engage in dialogue, though perceived dissimilarity of moral minds did correlate with dehumanization.

Study 4 found that people generally believe that opponents' political beliefs are driven by something distinct. While our own political beliefs are driven by an internal moral compass, opponents are driven more by external pressures, idiocy, or immorality. This failure to acknowledge opponents' moral reasons, including harm based reasons, corresponds with a decrease in willingness to engage in dialogue.

Finally, in the last set of studies, I used an experimental model to test whether manipulating perceived moral similarity can decrease political animosity. I found that relative to

perceive moral dissimilarity (Study 5, 6a, 6b, 8), a control (Studies 6a and 6b), and other types of similarity (Study 7, 8), moral similarity decreased dehumanization which in turn increased actual engagement (Study 5), or willingness to engage in political dialogue (Study 5).

*Implications for Pragmatic Utility of Different Moral Theories.* This research was inspired by the Theory of Dyadic Morality. Nonetheless, the veracity of this paper's findings are independent on the veracity of the larger theory. There can be a pragmatic benefit of focusing on moral overlap regardless of whether liberals and conservatives have fundamentally different or similar moral minds. Indeed the studies presented here could be consistent with both the Theory of Dyadic Morality, and Moral Foundations Theory, since both acknowledge that liberals and conservatives both value harm. One can be a strong believer in Moral Foundations Theory, while still seeing the utility of focusing on moral similarity instead of moral differences.

Pragmatism is different from scientific validity, and there might be other situations where focusing on moral differences is more fruitful. For example, framing issues like environmentalism in terms of purity can influence policy attitudes (Kidwell, Farmer, & Hardesty, 2013; Rottman, Kelemen, & Young, 2015), and makes conservatives appear more pro-environment (Feinberg & Willer, 2013, 2015). However, if the goal is to get political opponents to listen to each other, at least initially, focusing first on our shared moral values is more effective than highlighting the points of disagreement.

### **Open Questions & Future Directions**

*Unique to harm?* In this paper, I framed moral similarity in terms of harm-based moral values. For example, in study four I looked specifically at whether we fail to acknowledge the harm-based reasons of our moral opponents, and whether this failure corresponds to greater dehumanization. Additionally, the experimental manipulation in the later studies highlighted the

moral similarity between the participant and the political opponent in their valuing of harm and care. I focused on harm-based moral similarity because the Theory of Dyadic Morality predicts that harm acts as a common currency in morality, translating between different moral values, and between liberals and conservatives (Schein & Gray, 2017).

However, the data presented here are insufficient for the conclusion that appeals to harm *per se* is what reduces political animosity relative to other potential types of moral similarity. In fact, Study 4 found that we fail to attribute general moral reasons to political opponents, and this more generalized asymmetry corresponds to increases in dehumanization. Although the paper suggests consistently that focusing on moral dissimilarity, more specifically disagreements about purity, loyalty, and authority, increases dehumanization relative to a minimal-information control condition, it is possible that believing that liberals and conservatives are united in the fact that they both have deeply held moral reasons, could be enough to reduce dehumanization of political opponents. Because similarity was consistently associated with harm, and difference with the Moral Foundations Theory framework, this paper cannot make definitive conclusions about harm. Future research should test whether appeals to a common harm based language are particularly effective at reducing political animosity.

*Additional Mechanisms?* In this paper, I focused primarily on the impact that dehumanization has on reducing the willingness to engage in political dialogue. I found that in multiple studies, dehumanization statistically mediated the connection between perceived value similarity, and willingness to engage in dialogue. However, dehumanization is offered as only one of potentially multiple mechanisms linking value similarity and increased willingness to engage in dialogue.

Another potential mechanism linking perceived moral similarity to political engagement: reduced fear of relationship harm. People tend to associate with like-minded others (McPherson et al., 2001), a general finding that applies with partisanship as well (Alford, Hatemi, Hibbing, Martin, & Eaves, 2011; Huber & Malhotra, 2017). Political opponents' online dating profiles seem less favorable (Huber & Malhotra, 2017), and people generally disapprove of their children marrying a political opponent (Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012). People will physically distance themselves from a person holding an opposing moralized political issues (Skitka & Morgan, 2014), potentially because they psychophysiological anxiety symptoms at the thought of engaging in dialogue on value disagreements (Kouzakova et al., 2014). Focusing on overlapping moral values should assuage concerns that a relationship will be harmed, and lead to an increase willingness to engage in dialogue.

Consistent with this possibility, in Study 1 I found that perceptions of the potential harm to a relationship partially mediated the correlational link between moral dissimilarity and interest in listening. Of course, this data is only correlational. Future research should test whether manipulations of perceived moral similarity reduce perceived harm to relationships, which in turn increases people's willingness to engage in difficult relationships.

*Is there a Political Asymmetry?* There is an open question in the literature on whether political prejudice and political tolerance are asymmetrical, or whether liberals and conservatives exhibit political prejudice equally (Chambers, Schlenker, & Collisson, 2013; Crawford, Brandt, Inbar, Chambers, & Motyl, 2017; Crawford, Mallinas, & Furman, 2015; Crawford & Pilanski, 2014). Consistent with the ideological asymmetry perspective is research suggesting that conservatives exhibit greater prejudice in general, with right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation corresponding to greater prejudice to a variety of groups (Whitley Jr,

1999), including ethnic minorities, sexual minorities (Crawford, Brandt, Inbar, & Mallinas, 2016) and women (Sibley & Duckitt, 2008). Other scholars suggest a more balanced conclusion. When it comes to ratings of political opponents (Brandt et al., 2016), social conservatives seem no more prejudiced than social liberals (Crawford et al., 2017) and liberals and conservatives are equally motivated to avoid conversations (Frimer et al., 2017).

I had no a priori predictions about political asymmetries, so the analysis I presented in this paper is strictly exploratory and I did not analyze political differences in the intervention studies out of concern for sample size. In Study 1, there was some evidence that liberals exhibited a greater unwillingness to listen to political opponents than conservatives. This direction goes against previous findings, and highlights the importance of contextualizing any research finding about political asymmetries. It could be that in a Trump era, talking to political opponents is psychologically different for liberals and conservatives. Talking about politics when your party is in power might be experienced as less threatening than when your party is out of power. Conversely, the fact that the leader of the opposing party is so hated might have elevated perceived unwillingness to engage with any party member. I am also hesitant to make any strong inferences about politics as Study 3 failed to find any correlation between politics and dehumanization of political opponents, though there was a small correlation in Study 4.

*Would it generalize?* Another open question is the generalizability of the effect. Would an appeal to intrapersonal moral similarity bleed over into a decrease of political animosity to other political opponents, or to political parties? A lot of political psychology research examines prejudice or political tolerance at the level of the group. For example, the American National Election Survey (ANES) uses a feeling thermometer for Republicans/Democrats. The now classic, least liked groups paradigm for measuring political intolerance (Sullivan, Piereson, &

Marcus, 1993) asks people to list or select from a list, the group they dislike the most, and then answer tolerance questions. In contrast to this previous work, in my experimental studies, I intentionally focused on perceptions of individuals. I made this decision intentionally because political conversations are interpersonal. When we are interacting with a neighbor, or at the Thanksgiving table, we are not interacting faceless abstract groups, but with people with specific identities.

Nonetheless, this design choice still leaves open several questions. First, does the intervention increasing perceived similarity with another specific individual generalize to perceived similarity between political parties? Conversely, would appeals to moral similarity between liberals and conservatives as groups would also shift openness to interacting with a specific individual, or with political opponents in general. Correlational data suggests that appeals to general similarity might be effective. Study three did find that the endorsement that liberals and conservatives in general are morally similar correlated with the willingness to engage with a political opponent. However, it is still an open question whether the focus at the group level would be as effective. The mechanism I have focused on throughout this paper is dehumanization. A great way to humanize a person is to actually sit and talk with them, and to learn some information about that specific person. Manipulating general beliefs about a general population might make a small difference, but potentially not as strong of an effect as fully bringing to light the story of one individual.

Due to the nature of the manipulation, it is also unclear whether a specific similarity appeal would be effective in improving already existing social relationships. One of the major limitations of these studies, as well as almost all studies on intergroup interactions (MacInnis & Page-Gould, 2015), is that all studies were about engaging with a stranger. It is possible that the

size of the effect could change, and even increase, if the interaction was with a family member, friend, or political partner. There is reason to believe that it might, since there might be greater incentive to maintain strong relationships, despite political differences.

It is also unclear if an appeal to moral similarity would be effective in increasing peoples willingness to engage with political extremes. In my experimental studies, the political opponent was not described in any sort of extremes. He was a fellow mTurker, who presumably does not hold any political office. When interacting on an everyday basis with another person, appeals to moral similarity might be enough to encourage difficult dialogue. However, it is an open question whether appeals to similarity can also work in the more extreme cases. Will appeals to moral similarity help perceptions of political elite? What about perceptions of political opponents who are more vocal and active in their causes? Appeals to shared values might simply be unbelievable when the opponent is at either political extremity. Even if the appeal is believable, a hatred of the political leader might override any similarity manipulation. Furthermore, knowing that the person has moral values, and moral agency, might make their position seem even more absurd. Future research should test the boundary to where appeals to moral similarity are effective, or if there is a point where appeals to moral similarity backfire.

*Would a similarity intervention be effective if focused on a specific issue?* The final set of studies were intentionally designed to foster increased respect for political opponents outside of conversations about a specific topic. Therefore, the similarity intervention was designed to highlight general moral similarity. Another way that one could manipulate perceived moral similarity is to focus on the moral overlap on a specific topic. For example, one study could use the madlib presented in the introduction of this survey, and then see if highlighting the overlapping moral structure can increase respect for political opponents. Presumably,



highlighting the shared importance of protecting children should increase respect for the opposing view. However, I have some hesitation in full-heartedly endorsing this strategy.

It is still an open question whether the legitimacy of an argument, or the perceived harmfulness of opposing perspectives, mitigates the appeal to shared values. I can understand an opponent's concern for their children, but if that concern translates into policy endorsement that I believe to be ludicrous (e.g. arming teachers), or outright harmful and thus immoral (e.g. banning trans teens from using bathrooms), then appeals to shared concerns for children are likely irrelevant. Take the debate on gay rights as an example. As a scientist, I can recognize that some people's moral opposition to gay marriage is driven by a genuine desire to protect their children. Even though I care about protecting children as well, I am completely unmoved by their position, because I see their position as directly linked to increased suicide rates of LGBT youth. Focusing on our shared concern on our children's well being might increase initial respect, and help open a dialogue. If that focus on children is initially situated within the context of a severe moral disagreement, any impact of similarity might be totally wiped away. Future research should test the context in which appeals to moral similarity are, and are not, effective.

*How to scale up?* This study used a single paradigm to increase perceived similarity – providing feedback highlighting moral overlap with a political opponent after participants completed a questionnaire. My manipulation check did show that this intervention was consistently effective at increasing perceived moral overlap. Despite its effectiveness, this intervention is potentially limited in its applicability. It is simply not feasible to ask people to complete surveys before engaging in a bipartisan dialogue. The manipulation was designed to provide experimental evidence for the causal importance of perceived moral similarity in

reducing political animosity, not to be a clever real-world intervention. The next step is to find a simple intervention that can be easily scaled up.

If the goal is to improve dialogue steeped in moral disagreement, perhaps starting that dialogue with a conversation on shared values would be sufficient to mitigate potential animosities. If negotiations become increasingly tense, perhaps taking the time to list three moral similarities can help return the conversation to civility. My manipulation assumed that you already have a conversation partner. If the goal is to get people more willing to even attend a bipartisan dialogue, then perhaps an intervention that focuses on group similarity would be more effective. My studies suggest that perceived moral similarity can psychologically reduce animosity. It is still an open question how I can translate that basic knowledge into practical advice.

## **Conclusion**

In the mid-afternoon of February 14, 2018, 17 members of the Stoneman Douglas High School community in Parkland, Florida were killed by a lone gunman bearing an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle. In the post-Columbine era, school shootings stories have become tragically cliché, except something different happened. Teenage victims of the massacre organized quickly and effectively. Speaking out in passionate and powerful voices, they kept the country's attention on the dangers of highly-permissive gun laws (as suggested by google trends data; Chang, 2018), and they ignited a national student-led movement. These students consistently appealed to a common moral value, protecting children, to promote political action. For example, in organizing his schools Walkout to End Gun Violence, one student from New York noted in a post that later went viral:

“Politically, this is a bipartisan event. Both the MHS Democrats and MHS Young Republicans have decided to put country and life over party to end the atrocious epidemic. This isn’t a left vs. right issue, it’s a life versus death one... Together, we can tell Congress that our generation will not stand idle a second longer while our fellow students are slaughtered doing something as innocent as receiving an education. Together, we can make a difference” – Jackson Bayer, high school student at Mamaroneck High School, February 18, 2018, posted on MHS Walkout to End Gun Violence.

This student eloquently illustrates the take-home point of my dissertation. Perceptions of moral overlap increase our willingness to engage with opponents. When we see others as morally dissimilar, we are more likely to dehumanize them, and are less likely to engage in dialogue. If, however, we focus on a shared moral goal, such as keeping our schools safe, then we can move beyond partisanship, and start working together. If we want to engage in challenging bipartisan dialogue, instead of starting with issues that divide us, start by establishing similarities.

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